

A Devastating Decade of Dying Dreams:
How the 1980s Farm Crisis Changed Rural America

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In July, I began my National History Day project by searching for the perfect topic related to my passion, agriculture. My curiosity concerning the 1980s farm crisis was initially sparked from working on the family farm and hearing my grandparents' recollections about challenges they faced during that decade. Later, my curiosity deepened after learning that shuttered businesses in my rural community were a casualty of the farm crisis. Furthermore, I knew the farm crisis was the right topic since it marked a major turning point for rural American life that I was excited to learn about.

In August, I began reading books, journal articles, and watching films to build overall knowledge on my topic. One particular book by Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *When a Dream Dies: Agriculture, Iowa, and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s*, was exceptionally useful because it expertly explained the farm crisis's ripple effect on rural America. In October, I visited the University of Northern Iowa library where I gathered additional journal articles and newspapers that provided personal perspectives on my topic at the time it occurred. In November, I visited the State Historical Society of Iowa where I obtained primary source documents and letters from the Terry Branstad Papers and farm crisis photographs from the Bill Gillette and Larry Day collections. These provided a lens through which to more clearly view the farm crisis. Later, I gained permission from David Peterson to use his Pulitzer Prize winning photographs in my project, which captured the heart-wrenching human impact of the farm crisis. Additionally, I found useful primary source documents, photographs, and footage in online collections from the Library of Congress, National Archives, Illinois Digital Newspaper Archives, Associated Press, History Nebraska Archives, and the University of Minnesota Institute of Agriculture. Finally, I conducted interviews with former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad

about leading the state during the farm crisis, 90-year-old farmer and U.S. Senator Charles Grassley who provided political and personal perspectives, 74-year-old farmer Roger Buchholz who discussed his struggle to obtain credit and buy land during the 1980s crisis, and former U.S. Representative Dave Nagle who negotiated the 1987 Farm Credit Act in his office.

With my research complete, I began creating my project. I selected the website category because I felt I could best portray my topic through a combination of pictures, documents, quotes, audio clips, video clips, and my own words. I created my project using NHD WebCentral, selected gray as an accent color to symbolize this dark time, and utilized iMovie to edit multimedia clips.

My thesis presents a strong argument concerning my topic, has clear theme connections, and demonstrates historical significance. A combination of political, economic, and technological factors triggered the 1980s farm crisis, a devastating decade of failed farms, bank closures, and shuttered storefronts, which represented a tragic turning point for the rural American dream. Although activist pleas brought eventual government intervention that salvaged the overall farm economy, it was too late to reverse damage done to rural America that remains still today.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Advertisement

Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Co. "Millions of Acres." Advertisement. 1872.
Retrieved from Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.13401300/>.

This 1872 Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Co. advertisement promoted land sales in Iowa and Nebraska by offering ten year credit at low interest rates. I placed this ad on the "Family Farms" page of my website to show how early rural settlers gained land and established family farms, which expanded access to the American dream beyond just urban America.

Diary

Depression Diary of Elmer Powers, 1932-1933. Digital transcript of original diary.
University of Northern Iowa. https://iowahist.uni.edu/Social_Economic/Powers_Diary/elmer_powers_diary.htm.

Iowa farmer Elmer Powers' diary discussed his concerns about commodity prices and banks during an earlier farm crisis in the 1930s. I used a quote from his diary on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website about the hardships family farmers faced during that time. This provided important historical context for understanding the later 1980s farm crisis, which similarly impacted farmers but without the same level of government intervention to save the family farm.

Snyder, Beverly. Tractorcade Trip to Washington, DC Diary, January 18 – February 8, 1979. Digital transcript of original diary. Kinsley Public Library.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/16qs2ZmPk6EVFIU_1hDhT0_dkHxC7qeiD/view.

Kansas farmer Beverly Snyder wrote this diary that discussed challenges she and other American farmers faced, which prompted them to drive their tractors to Washington D.C. in an attempt to draw attention to the rapidly deteriorating farm economy. Beverly shared the mission of the tractorcade in which she was participating and her feelings about her experiences. I used a quote from her diary on the "Public Reactions" page of my website about how farmers worked together to spark interest regarding the need for immediate government intervention to save the family farm.

Film

“Farm Crisis Strategies For Survival.” Video. Wisconsin PBS. April 18, 1985. Accessed January 22, 2024. <https://www.pbs.org/video/wpt-documentaries-farm-crisis/>.

This 1985 Wisconsin PBS program provided an up-close look at the farm crisis, which included farm foreclosure sale footage as well as interviews with farmers and politicians. This greatly enhanced my knowledge about the effects of the crisis on both farming operations and nearby rural communities that were heavily dependent on agriculture related industries. I used a video excerpt from this program on the “Financial Fallout” page of my website because it provided a look at the events of the farm crisis and their human impact at the time they occurred.

Government Documents

Homestead Act, Public Law 37-64 (12 STAT 392); May 20, 1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789 - 2011; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives, Washington, DC. <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/homestead-act>.

The Homestead Act of 1862 provided 160 acres of land to individuals who agreed to make improvements and live there for five years. I discussed this act on the “Family Farms” page of my website because it established family farms as the foundation of rural life. It also provided important historical context for understanding the threat posed to that tradition during the 1980s farm crisis.

Homesteading Certificate of Eligibility for Daniel Freeman; 1/20/1868; Homestead Final Certificates, 1863 - 1887; Records of the Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/homesteading-certificate-daniel-freeman>.

This certificate verified Daniel Freeman as the first American to successfully file a claim for land under the Homestead Act of 1862. Freeman initiated his claim on January 1, 1868, after meeting government requirements for land ownership, which included living on, working, and improving the land for five consecutive years. I included this document on the “Family Farms” page of my website because it illustrated the method by which most family farms were established.

“H.R.3030 - 100th Congress (1987-1988): Agricultural Credit Act of 1987.” January 6, 1988. U.S. Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/3030>.

The Agricultural Credit Act of 1987 was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan and provided needed credit assistance to farmers that helped them avoid foreclosure and keep their land. However, it was far too late to save the thousands of American farms that were lost to foreclosure earlier in the decade. I discussed this act on the “Political Reactions” page of my website because it provided important evidence for my argument regarding the slow nature of government intervention.

Proceedings of the National Governors’ Association Annual Meeting 1983. Washington, National Governors’ Association, 1983.

This document recounted the proceedings of the 1983 National Governors’ Association Annual Meeting during which the farm crisis was a major topic of discussion. At the insistence of governors in the agricultural belt, the group committed to enhancing their relationships with the federal government in order to sustain the role of agriculture in the nation’s economy. I used an excerpt from this report on the “Political Reactions” page of my website as an example of how state governors in agricultural states acted to intervene in the farm crisis well before the federal government because of the negative impact on their state’s ag-dependent economies.

Interviews

Branstad, Terry. Interview by the author. January 19, 2024.

It was a great thrill to interview former Iowa Governor, Terry Branstad, who led the state through the farm crisis of the 1980s. Branstad discussed events of the 1970s that led to the crisis, farm foreclosures and bank closures, letters he received and reactions he witnessed from people experiencing the crisis, and actions he took to aid farmers along with the overall state economy. Branstad’s interview provided information and quotes I used on several pages of my website, as well as a video clip and a quote I used on the “Political Reactions” page of my website.

Branstad, Terry. Oral Narrative Interview by Andrew Klumpp. State Historical Society of Iowa, November 29, 2022.

When I visited the State Historical Society of Iowa in August, I spoke with and received guidance from *Annals of Iowa* editor, Andrew Klumpp, who gave me access to the unpublished, nearly four-hour long, raw footage of his interview with former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad about the farm crisis. This significantly deepened my overall understanding about the 1980s crisis and people's desperate pleas for government intervention, as well as prompted my desire to ask several follow-up questions, which I did later when I interviewed Governor Branstad myself. Additionally, this interview provided a quote I used on the "Public Reactions" page of my website about the gut-wrenching personal stories Governor Branstad heard during the town hall meetings he held throughout the state.

Buchholz, Roger. Interview by the author. January 28, 2024.

I had the pleasure of interviewing my 74-year-old grandfather Roger Buchholz, who discussed difficulties he experienced obtaining credit to buy a farm during the farm crisis in 1981. He recalled being frustrated by loan rates as high as fifteen percent on land he bought for \$3200 an acre that dropped in value to \$850 an acre soon after, as well as difficulties he faced borrowing money to expand his farrow-to-finish hog operation in 1986. His personal recollections greatly deepened my understanding about the impact the farm crisis had on individual farmers.

Butz, Earl. Interview by Lane Beatty. Associated Press Archives. December 31, 1975. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9bVCuUfOM&ab_channel=APArchive.

In this 1975 recorded interview, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz discussed his Eastern European and Middle Eastern farm tour, which reinforced his belief that they needed U.S. grain exports to feed their people. That is why, in 1973, Butz urged farmers to plant "fencerow to fencerow", which brought rapid expansion in the farming industry. I used a clip from Butz's interview on the "1970s: Boom" page of my website because this overexpansion later harmed farmers when commodity prices dropped and interest rates rose to record levels.

Duroe, Albert. Interview by Paul Yeager. Market to Market Podcast, August 3, 2021.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdKMi86ldCU&ab_channel=MarkettoMarket.

I consider this 2021 Market to Market podcast episode a primary source because it was a 30-minute unedited interview with former Iowa banker Albert Duroe about his experiences during the 1980s farm crisis. Duroe's account provided an important financial perspective concerning the farm crisis by describing how bankers' hands were often tied in making lending decisions, which caused them considerable anguish when they had to foreclose on friends and neighbors. This interview provided helpful information for the "Financial Fallout" page of my website.

Grassley, Charles. Interview by the author. January 30, 2024.

A project highlight was conducting a 45-minute personal interview with U.S. Senator Charles Grassley (IA) about his experiences as both a farmer and Senator during the farm crisis. He provided insight about events prior to the crisis, government intervention, and the impact of the farm crisis. I used an audio clip from this interview on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website regarding how economic actions triggered the farm crisis, and a quote on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website concerning farm consolidation and the loss of family farms.

Nagle, David. Interview by the author. March 29, 2024.

Following the district National History Day contest in March, I was fortunate to conduct an interview with former U.S. Congressman David Nagle (IA), who spent thirty minutes discussing the 1987 Farm Credit Bill. Upon entering office in 1986, Nagle immediately set his focus on fixing the broken farm credit system by bringing together a mixed group of agricultural stakeholders at his office where they worked tirelessly for six weeks mapping out a plan to reform the broken system. I included an audio clip from Congressman Nagle's interview on the "Political Reactions" page of my website because it was this long-overdue federal action that finally brought an end to the decade-long flood of farm foreclosures.

Journal Articles

Allison, Clinton B., et al. "The Agrarian Tradition in American Society." *History of the Institute of Agriculture: Publications*, 1976. [https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer= &httpsredir=1&article=1004&context=utk_aghistory](https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1004&context=utk_aghistory).

This 1976 journal article provided rich historical information about the American agrarian tradition and its importance to American heritage. It discussed Thomas Jefferson's policy objective, which focused on land ownership through the establishment of family-sized farms, to demonstrate the deep roots of America's family farm tradition. Thus, this article provided important historical context that I included on the "Family Farms" page of my website.

Butz, Earl L. "The Agricultural Dilemma." *Journal of ASFMRA*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1958): 8–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43756081>.

Earl Butz, Dean of Agriculture at Purdue University and later U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, wrote this 1958 journal article about how agriculture had undergone two revolutions in its history, and was in the midst of its third. That revolution, he explained, was one where agriculture found itself changing from a way of living to a way of making a living, which brought about the need for family farms to consolidate into larger, more productive farms. I used a quote from Butz on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website concerning consolidation trends and his belief that growth was the answer, which brought overexpansion that contributed to the farm crisis.

Letters

Bates, Todd. Letter, September 17, 1985. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

Todd Bates, a high school senior and farm boy from Osage, Iowa, wrote a letter to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, where he expressed fear that his lifelong dream of taking over the family farm was in danger due to the dire situation farmers faced in the 1980s. His letter stated deep concern about low commodity and land prices that were causing great hardship for his family. I used his letter on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to show how the farm crisis marked the death of a dream for rural youth who planned their future around farming.

Durley, Edward. Letter, January 3, 1986. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1986, Edward Durley of Niagara Falls, New York, wrote a letter to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad making it very clear he believed farmers needed to solve their own problems. He included ideas for governors nationwide to implement, which he felt could fix the farm economy, mostly by limiting production. I used an excerpt from Durley's letter on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to show opinions of those opposed to government aid for farmers, which was starkly different than public opinion during the 1930s farm crisis.

Karsten, Gary. Letter, March 9, 1985. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

Iowan Gary Karsten wrote a letter to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad that opposed bailing out troubled farmers. He blamed the farmers themselves for mismanagement and stated that taxpayers should not be held responsible for their rescue. I used an excerpt from this letter on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to represent the unsympathetic perspective of many citizens concerning the plight of family farmers during the 1980s crisis.

Mrs. Witt. Letter, October 18, 1985. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

An Iowa farm wife wrote this letter to Governor Terry Branstad pleading her case that farmers needed government assistance quickly to save their farms. She also shared how her own efforts to help her family were undermined when the finance company she worked for filed for bankruptcy due to the dire agricultural loan situation. I used a quote from this letter on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to show the desperation farmers and their families felt due to the crisis.

Patterson, Tim. Postcard, October 28, 1985. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

Tim Patterson of Dubuque, Iowa, sent this hand-drawn postcard to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad in 1985. It showed two pigs, one of which was shedding tears, and posed the question, "What can you and I together do about it?" I included this postcard on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to show the emotional effects of the crisis on farmers and the range of communication methods they used to relay that message to politicians.

Paulsen, Lois. Letter, November 6, 1985. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

During the heart of the farm crisis in 1985, Iowa farm wife Lois Paulsen wrote this letter to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad pleading for help saving their family farm from foreclosure. Paulsen posed a question concerning why the Farmers Home Administration didn't have money to help farmers since that was the purpose of that government agency. I used a quote from this letter on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website to illustrate feelings of desperation and hopelessness felt by family farmers as the farm crisis persisted.

Pickrell, Oliver. Letter, March 1, 1986. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

Pickrell's letter expressed harsh disapproval of Iowa Governor Branstad, who he criticized for citing Ronald Reagan's actions, rather than the farmers themselves, for the financial troubles farmers experienced during the 1980s. Pickrell's message placed the blame squarely on farmers for their own financial ruin and showed no sympathy for them. I used a quote from his letter on the "Public Reactions" page of my website that symbolized a widespread absence of empathy for farmers expressed by people who didn't farm.

Sandra. Letter, September 30, 1985. Agriculture Box 90. Keith Heffernan Iowa Letters. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

Sandra, a farm wife from Maxwell, Iowa, didn't include her last name on this gut-wrenching letter she wrote to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, which described the emotional toll she faced each day on a family farm approaching bankruptcy. She discussed how her husband worked himself to the point of exhaustion and was still short on money, as well as how they had to borrow their son's money to buy food, which she called hell on earth. I used an excerpt from this letter on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to show the dire situation family farmers faced.

Magazines

Church, George J., et al. 1985. "Real Trouble On The Farm: As Losses Mount, a Bitter Debate Begins over the Government's Role." *TIME*, February 18, 1985, 24.

This article discussed comments made by David Stockman, President Reagan's budget director, who believed it was not the taxpayer's job to bail out farmers who he felt were to blame for their own financial problems. Some Congressional leaders, especially those in midwest states, were angered by Stockman's words and the speed by which the administration pulled government funding away from the agricultural sector. I used a quote from Stockman on the "Political Reactions" page of my website that showed the administration's animosity toward farmers.

DeMott, John S., and Lee Griggs. "Sac City Fights for Survival in a Failing Iowa Farm Town." *TIME*, vol. 127, no. 7, February 1986, p. 30.

DeMott's article discussed the effects of the farm crisis on Sac City, Iowa, a small farming community nearing collapse. The farm crisis resulted in the loss of many farms, residents, and businesses, which left rural communities trying to find new sources of employment. I used this headline on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website to show the farm crisis's effects on rural communities.

Easterbrook, Gregg. "Making Sense of Agriculture." *The Atlantic*, July 1985, 63-78.

Easterbrook's article examined a major contributing factor to the 1980s farm crisis – overproduction, which resulted in huge surpluses and plummeting prices. It also discussed that many blamed farmers for their own misfortune, and shared statistics that debunked that belief. I used two article quotes from a farmer on the "1970s: Boom" and the "1980s: Bust" pages of my website that provided insight regarding the farmer's decision to expand his operation, as well as his misfortune when high interest rates forced his family farm into foreclosure.

"Grain Becomes a Weapon." *TIME*, January 21, 1980, 12-22.

This article discussed President Carter's 1980 grain embargo against the Soviet Union in response to their invasion of Afghanistan. This provided clarity about the damage it caused when commodity prices plummeted, which brought further suffering to farmers already reeling from unexpected interest rate hikes. I used this magazine cover and an article quote on the "1980s: Bust" page of my website to illustrate the embargo and its role in the onset of the farm crisis.

Koepp, Stephen, Gisela Bolte, and Lee Griggs. "Amber Waves of Strain: U.S. Farm Bounty Has Grown into a Burden." *TIME*, July 21, 1980, 46.

This 1986 *Time* article discussed how bumper crops and increasingly self-sufficient foreign agricultural markets caused a rise in agricultural surpluses, which caused problems for farmers and agriculture related industries, such as farm implement dealers, whose sales plummeted. This information helped me in the creation of the "1980s: Bust" page of my website.

"The New American Farmer: As a Bin-busting Harvest Rolls In, the Rule Is: Get Big or Get Out." *TIME*, November 6, 1978, 92-102.

This *Time* article discussed the 1970s farm economy when high commodity prices, technological advancements, and record harvests made political officials urge farmers to "get big or get out." I used this article's headline and a chart on the "1970s: Boom" page of my website to show the political pressures farmers faced to expand their operations to meet the growing demands of a highly profitable international market, which they wrongly assumed was the new norm.

Newspapers

Brown, Craig. "Farm Crisis Is Still Here-New Hotline Surfaces." *Quad-City Times* (Davenport, IA), August 16, 1987, 3B.

Brown's article discussed the Farm Survival Hotline, which was a joint effort among various groups that aided distressed farmers during the 1980s. I used this article's headline on the "Political Reactions" page of my website to illustrate efforts among government and private organizations to help the situation.

Cedar Rapids Gazette (Cedar Rapids, IA). "Governor to Discuss Assistance to Laid-off Deere and Co. Workers." October 5, 1985, 5A.

This article discussed how one of Waterloo, Iowa's largest employers, Deere and Company, planned to lay off 480 workers due to the strains of the farm crisis. It also shared how Governor Terry Branstad's administration met with displaced workers and planned to offer state aid to the laid off workers. I used this headline on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website where I discussed how the farm crisis decimated ag-related industries, which led to the out-migration of people who faced sudden unemployment and little hope for a future in the heartland.

The Cincinnati Post (Cincinnati, OH). "Iowa Declares Moratorium on Foreclosures of Farms." October 2, 1985, 3A.

This article discussed a 1985 farm foreclosure moratorium imposed by Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, which helped save one thousand family farms through an executive order that was the first of its kind since the 1930s. I used the headline from this article on the "Political Reactions" page of my website because the governor's actions were seen by many as the first warning to Congress that agriculture was in immediate danger and needed help.

The Daily Press (Escanaba, MI). "Farmers Face Economic, Political Dangers in '80s." January 3, 1980, 12.

This article explained how farmers in the 1980s faced a difficult economic and political situation that profoundly impacted their livelihood on the family farm. Rising interest rates, declining commodity prices, and unfavorable government policies made it almost impossible for farmers to pay off loans and make a profit. I used this article's headline on the "1980s: Bust" page of my website to highlight the dire situation that began a free fall for family farms during the farm crisis.

DeBoer, Jess. "American Ag Movement Moves to Politics, Lobbying." *Cedar Rapids Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, IA), July 23, 1978, 6B.

This article discussed two farmer members of the American Agriculture Movement and the organization's collective activism to promote change. One farmer traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby congress, which resulted in changes to the farm program that spring. I used this article's headline on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to illustrate how collective activism among farmers provided them with a stronger voice to help farmers.

Elkin, Larry. "Farmers May Bear Brunt of Carter Grain Embargo." *The Havre Daily News* (Havre, MT), January 8, 1980.

Elkin's article discussed the Carter administration's January 1980 decision to impose a U.S. grain embargo on the Soviet Union in response to their 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. This greatly impacted American farmers who faced declining demand for their products, large surpluses, and plummeting prices. I used this headline on the "1980s: Bust" page of my website because this political action, in combination with high interest rates, low land prices, and agricultural overexpansion, created the conditions that caused the 1980s farm crisis.

Farmers' Weekly Review (Joliet, IL). "Lawmakers Race to Make Major Farm Bill Changes." October 9, 1986, 1.

This article discussed lawmaker's work on policy updates for the 1987 farm credit act proposal. A big discussion was whether to limit U.S. government payments to farmers during times of low commodity prices and how to regain competitiveness in the world grain markets. I used an excerpt from this article on the "Political Reactions" page of my website to highlight a long overdue congressional response to the dire situation faced by farmers in the 1980s.

Green, Larry. "15,000 Farmers Angrily Protest Reagan Policies." *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1985.

Green's article discussed the formation of an eighteen state rural coalition that joined together at a rally in Ames, Iowa, to bring national attention to the economic conditions that were pushing farmers off their land. I used a quote from this article on the "Public Reactions" page of my website that captured the actions of farmers and other rural Americans to protect their way of life.

Hershey Jr., Robert D. "Reagan Administration Rejects, for Now, Farm Credit System Aid." *The New York Times*, November 1, 1985, B7.

Hershey's article discussed the Reagan administration's refusal to provide additional federal funding for the Farm Credit System, which provided loans to farmers for land and equipment purchases. I used this article's headline on the "Political Reactions" page of my website to show the lack of immediate action by the Reagan administration to help with debt restructuring that ultimately would have saved many family farms from foreclosure.

Jaynes, Gregory. "U.S. Farmers Said to Face Worst Year Since 1930s." *The New York Times*, March 28, 1982, sec. 1, 1.

This article discussed similarities during the 1930s and 1980s when production expenses far exceeded revenues, due to unexpected surpluses, low commodity prices, and high interest rates. Farmers held onto hope but sunk deeper in debt as loan delinquency rates reached 58 percent! I used a quote from this article on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website about 1980s farm foreclosure rates.

Lancaster Farming (Ephrata, Pennsylvania). "Getting More Acres to the Gallon." January 19, 1974. <https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/?a=d&d=PLF19740119.2.66&srpos=22&e=-1970---1990--en-20--21--img-txIN-energy+crisis+farming----->.

This article discussed technological advancements and increased efficiency during the 1970s that prompted family farms to expand. I included this article's headline on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website because, throughout the 1970s, farmers expanded by using their existing land as collateral for adjustable rate loans they used to buy more land. Later, in the 1980s when land prices fell and rates rose, they defaulted on their loans and lost their farms.

Lasley, Paul. "Quality of Life for Farmers Better but Pessimism Prevails." *Sumner Gazette* (Sumner, IA), August 20, 1998, 6.

Paul's article discussed 1998 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll results where farmers reported slightly improved quality of life, but also pessimism about farming's future. The main reason for their better quality of life was jobs that farmers took off the farm that raised their income. I used a quote from this article on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website to show rural struggles associated with the rise of corporate farming.

Leonard, Lori. "Farm Crisis Began in '73, Group's Spokesman Says." *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), June 20, 1985, 9.

This article explained that the seeds of the 1980s crisis were sown in the 1970s when farmers ramped up production due to a supposed, ongoing, massive world food shortage. It also stated that banks were too aggressive in lending money to farmers in the 70s. I used an article quote on the "1970s: Boom" page of my website about how lender actions triggered the farm foreclosure epidemic, which marked a tragic turning point for family farms and rural American communities.

Moore, Louis. "Agriculture in Time of Change." *Lancaster Farming* (Ephrata, PA), December 3, 1977, 1.

This article discussed a rapid decline in farming during the late 1970s, as farm income dropped fifty percent from 1973, which was the second worst year since the Great Depression. As farming entered an era of uncertainty brought on by better weather overseas that caused growing grain surpluses and low commodity prices, smaller farms began to disappear. I used this article's headline on the "1970s: Boom" page of my website to connect 1970s actions with the 80s crisis.

New York Times. "Farm Debts Are High." December 21, 1981, sec. D, 6.

This article discussed the challenges faced by farmers due to a surge in agriculture debts. It further shined a light on the economic strain experienced within the farming community by highlighting other factors that caused the crisis. I used the title from this article and a brief excerpt on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website to illustrate the rapid increase in farm debt and its devastating effects on farmers' lives.

New York Times. "4 Dead in Rampage in an Iowa Town." December 10, 1985, A18.

This article discussed how Iowa farmer Dale Burr's mental health issues, caused by the impending loss of his farm to bank foreclosure, compelled the 63-year-old to murder his wife, neighbor, and banker before committing suicide. I used an excerpt from this article on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website because it showed the extreme human toll the 1980s farm crisis inflicted upon farm families nationwide.

New York Times. "Middle West Governors Urged to Put Farm Problems in Forefront." November 17, 1984, 10.

This article discussed how midwest governors banded together to raise awareness about the importance of agriculture and its economic effects. Their goal was to bring the agricultural crisis to the forefront and generate urgency for comprehensive policy reform that supported farmers. I used this headline on the "Political Reactions" page of my website to show the role rural governors played in achieving overdue federal intervention for farmers during the 1980s.

New York Times. "Reagan Signs a Bill to Rescue Troubled Farm Credit System." January 7, 1988, A20.

This article discussed the 1987 Farm Credit Act signed by President Reagan, which brought long overdue relief to farmers through restructuring the Farm Credit System. Additionally, it talked about Reagan's lingering opposition to some act provisions and future changes he wanted. I used this article's headline on the "Political Reactions" page of my website to highlight the arrival of long overdue aid for farmers, which came too late for many rural Americans who lost their farms during the prior seven years when the President refused to intervene.

Raasch, Chuck. "Farmers Get Deal on Land." *USA Today*, March 11, 1985, 3.

Raasch's article explained how farmers were hurting due to low prices and an extreme drop in land values, as well as offered an interesting prediction that a new generation of farmers backed by investors would buy up the countryside. For those not in debt, Raasch stated it was the perfect time to buy cheap land and machinery from struggling farmers who had no choice but to sell. I used an article excerpt on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website that had startling statistics about the number of mid-sized farms that folded during the farm crisis.

Robbins, William. "Despair Wrenches Farmers' Lives as Debts Mount and Land Is Lost." *New York Times*, February 10, 1985, 2.

Robbins' article discussed growing despair among farmers, as mounting debt and high interest rates made them unable to pay off loans. This deepened my understanding about 1970s events that planted the seeds of crisis in the 1980s. Also, I used an article excerpt about expansion on the "1970s: Boom" page of my website, the headline about the human side of the farm crisis on the "Financial Fallout" page, and a quote about business closures on the "Dying Dreams" page.

Robbins, William. "Suicides Reflect Growing Farm Depression." *Hutchinson News* (Hutchinson, KS), February 23, 1986, 34.

Robbin's article was hard to read because it shared stories of farmers who couldn't handle the shame of foreclosure and bankers whose crushing guilt from foreclosing on friends and neighbors led them to suicide and murder-suicide. It also included statistics about farmers' financial stress, which precipitated their extreme actions. I included the article's headline and a quote on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website to illustrate the tragic human side of the farm crisis.

Ryan, Peggy. "Farm Couple Quits-Drought Dried up Even Optimism." *The Capital Times* (Madison, WI), July 21, 1988, 35.

Ryan's article discussed the Lundgren family, who lost their farm in the 1980s, and the emotional toll they felt watching the sale of their cattle, hay, and machinery. I used this article's headline on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website because it was a compelling example of how the farm crisis crushed farmers' livelihoods, along with the dreams of future generations.

Schmidt, William E. "As Farm States Become Less Rural, Politics Also Changes." *New York Times*, January 8, 1989, E5.

This article explained how the 1980s farm crisis contributed to people losing their farms and abandoning small towns for economic opportunities. With new congressional boundaries being redrawn from census findings, many Midwestern states were set to lose seats in Congress and their political influence that upheld rural interests. I used this article's headline on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website to show how the farm crisis caused future uncertainty for many.

Schmidt, William E. "In Farm Belt, Fear of Foreclosures Rises." *New York Times*, January 16, 1983, 2.

This article discussed how farmers felt betrayed by the Farmers Home Administration for loaning them money to expand and then later seizing their assets when the farm economy crashed. It also provided statistics on F.H.A. farm delinquencies and the horrific foreclosure situation farmer's experienced, which is why I included this headline on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website.

Schneider, Keith. "Agriculture Dept. to Order Farmers to Pay Late Debt." *New York Times*, January 1, 1986, 1.

This 1986 article explained how the Farmers Home Administration planned to notify thousands of farmers that they had to make their farm loan payments or face foreclosure. It also discussed how President Reagan had recently signed a farm bill that lowered government farm subsidies to offset low commodity prices, which provided another nail in the coffin for farmers hanging onto their land by only a thread. I used a quote from this article on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website that showed how farm foreclosures negatively affected rural vitality.

Sullivan, Ken. "President Discusses Lebanon, Economy." *Cedar Rapids Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, IA), September 21, 1984, 1.

Sullivan's article discussed President Reagan's 1984 lengthy and crowded visit to a Norway, Iowa farm. Reagan emphasized the program he planned to unveil to ease debt for farmers by deferring payment on some Farmers Home Administration loans, which didn't end up happening. I used a photograph from this article on the "Political Reactions" page of my website because it illustrated the President making promises he didn't fulfill, which caused conditions for farmers go from bad to worse.

Tipton County Tribune (Tipton, IN). "Iowa Senator Will Reintroduce Farm Act."
September 15, 1986, 1.

This article discussed U.S. Senator Tom Harkin's reintroduction of the "Save the Family Farm Act" that brought parity to farmers nationwide. Harkin's actions followed his attendance at a farm rally in Omaha, Nebraska, where nearly 1,000 farmers displayed signs blaming government policies, or the lack thereof, for continued difficulties farmers faced in the 1980s. I used a quote from Senator Harkin that I obtained from this article on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website that discussed how the farm crisis marked the death of the American dream for too many Americans.

United Press International. "Farmers Unite at Rally." *Austin Daily Texan* (Austin, TX),
February 28, 1985, 4.

This article discussed the National Crisis Action Rally held in Ames, Iowa, where 15,000 farmers and state lawmakers packed a stadium for the biggest farm rally since the Great Depression. Hundreds of farmers waited outside and pounded nails into a fake coffin for federal budget director David Stockman because he did not support restructuring debt to help farmers. I used this article's headline on the "Public Reactions" page of my website as an example of collective activism that raised awareness about the farmers' plight and the need for government intervention.

Webb, Jerry. "Farm Talk." *Lancaster Farming*, (Ephrata, Pennsylvania). August 16,
1980. [https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/?a=d&d=PLF19800816.2.514
&srpos=48&e=-----198-en-20-PLF-41--img-txIN-jerry+webb-----](https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/?a=d&d=PLF19800816.2.514&srpos=48&e=-----198-en-20-PLF-41--img-txIN-jerry+webb-----).

Jerry Webb's 1980 "Farm Talk" column discussed many issues involving family farms and the challenges they faced that affected their continued existence with the looming farm crisis. While the family farm faced changes and challenges throughout its existence, the farm crisis brought a new level of circumstances for the farmer to deal with. I used a quote from this column on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website to illuminate the technological changes family farms endured that brought farm consolidation, a trend that was magnified in the 80s by the farm crisis.

Yepsen, David. "Put Farm Crisis in Perspective and Things Aren't All That Bad in Iowa." *Des Moines Register* (Des Moines, IA), August 5, 1985, 7A.

David Yepsen's editorial took the position that the farm crisis wasn't as devastating as it was being portrayed and that Iowa was actually doing alright. The author downplayed the crisis by stating that Iowa's economy wasn't singularly agricultural, as it had a robust insurance industry and other diversified business interests that were doing quite well. I used the headline from this article on the "Public Reactions" page of my website because it showed a prevailing attitude among non-agricultural interests who denied the gravity of the farm crisis situation, which slowed government intervention and further decimated farmers and rural farming communities.

Photographs

Butcher, Solomon D. *Mr. Jorns, Dry Valley, Custer County, Nebraska*. 1886. Photograph. Butcher, Solomon D. (Solomon Devore), 1856-1927, History Nebraska. https://nebraska.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_bcb9adc5-ce9e-46b9-a565-8b1b7e32c350/.

This 1886 photograph showed the Jorns family at their newly acquired Nebraska homestead with their young daughter, some livestock, and a windmill. The Jorns family represented both the hope and hardship associated with achieving the American dream in rural America through land ownership. I used this photograph on the "Family Farms" page of my website discussing how the Homestead Act helped establish the American family farm tradition.

Butcher, Solomon D. *Threshing on J.B. Lee Farm North of Shelton, Nebraska*. 1910. Photograph. Butcher, Solomon D. (Solomon Devore), 1856-1927, History Nebraska. https://nebraska.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_13be2495-dec2-47b7-abfd-a553681d4926/.

This photograph illustrates the labor-intensive nature of early farming in 1910, with numerous men lined up in front of two threshing machines, haystacks, and horses. This scene was typical during the 1800s during the time of the Homestead Act when many individuals staked their claim to property and lived on the land to pursue the American dream in rural America, which is why I included this photograph on the "Family Farms" page of my website. It was this very dream that died during the farm crisis of the 1980s as century old family farms were foreclosed upon and failed during this tragic turning point in history.

Day, Larry. *Crowd at Closing Out of a Farm Sale, Iowa*. December 1986. Photograph. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

This Larry Day Collection photograph showed a foreclosure auction during the 1980s farm crisis, whereby all the farmer's machinery, tools, and other prized possessions were on display and for sale. I used this photograph on the "Thesis" page of my website to illuminate a heartbreaking and common scene during the decade-long farm crisis, which created a devastating turning point for rural American life.

Gillette, Bill. *Attendees at Farm Foreclosure Auction, Story City, Iowa*. 1985-1986. Photograph. Voices of Protest Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shsi-library/48496503012/in/album-72157710200908747/>.

This Bill Gillette farm crisis photograph showed a foreclosure auction in Story City, Iowa, during the 1980s. A farmer holding a white cross and standing on a plow communicated the message to keep bids low, as the evicted farmer wished to keep the plow. I used this photograph on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website to show how farmers took action to support one another through the stress and strain of foreclosure during the farm crisis.

Gillette, Bill. *Bidder in Crowd at Auction on Ken Lewis Farm*. December 19, 1985. Photograph. Voices of Protest Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shsi-library/48496513827/in/album-72157710200908747/>.

This powerfully sad and symbolic Bill Gillette photograph showed a man in coveralls with a bidding number pinned to his chest at a 1985 farm auction. During the 1980s, farm auctions were a daily occurrence that indicated the loss of another family farm. I used this picture on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website to illustrate the emotional pain experienced by farmers facing financial ruin during the decade-long farm crisis in the 1980s that changed rural American life.

Gillette, Bill. *Eviction From a Family Farm: Vogel Family, Guthrie County*. November 8, 1986. Photograph. Voices of Protest Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shsi-library/48496521042/in/album-72157710200908747/>.

In 1986, Bill Gillette took this photograph of the Vogel family being evicted from their family farm in Guthrie County, Iowa, which powerfully captured the extreme anguish and despair so many farmers experienced during the farm crisis. I used this photograph on the “Financial Fallout” page of my website to show the range of negative emotions and stress the farm crisis inflicted upon thousands of families who lost land, which represented their only source of income and the only way of life they’d ever known.

Gillette, Bill. *Farm Equipment Auction, Ken Lewis, Cresco, Iowa*. December 19, 1985. Photograph. Voices of Protest Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shsi-library/48496517307/in/album-72157710200908747/>.

This Bill Gillette photograph showed a group of farmers attending an Iowa farm auction to protest the bank’s foreclosure actions. Many times those in attendance would shout “no sale” to disrupt the auction and delay the sale of the family farm and equipment. I placed this photograph on the “Thesis” page of my website to show the rise of activism among farmers during the 1980s, which represented a desperate attempt to draw attention to their plight and provoke political action before it was too late to save the family farm legacy.

Leffler, Warren K. *Tractors, one flying the flag of the American Agriculture Movement, on their way to the U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., during the “Tractorcade” protests of February 1979*. February 5, 1979. Photograph. U.S. News & World Report Magazine Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021637306/>.

This photograph showed an American Agriculture Movement tractorcade in Washington, D.C., which protested low commodity prices and the lack of government action to fix them. The A.A.M. and other similar organizations were created by farmers to bring about awareness regarding issues they faced and increase pressure for governmental intervention. I used this photograph on the “Public Reactions” page of my website because it is a great example of how farmers organized to create change, even though significant government action didn’t happen until 1987.

Members of the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition Encircle the Rotunda of the Iowa Capitol. 1984. Photograph. Des Moines Register Photo Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/picture-gallery/money/agriculture/2014/09/12/from-the-archives-iconic-iowa-farm-photos-since-1930/15519849/>.

This 1984 photograph from the Des Moines Register's archive showed Iowa Farm Unity Coalition members encircling the Iowa State Capitol rotunda and holding farm sale posters. This coalition engaged in protests to raise awareness regarding the need for government intervention during the 1980s farm crisis. I used this photograph on the "Political Reactions" page of my website as an example of activism to raise awareness and spur government intervention during the farm crisis.

Members of the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition Stage a Protest. 1985. Photograph. Des Moines Register Photo Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/picture-gallery/money/agriculture/2014/09/12/from-the-archives-iconic-iowa-farm-photos-since-1930/15519849/>.

This photograph showed Iowa Farm Unity Coalition members protesting during Governor Branstad's 1985 State of the State address. They wanted the government to end farm foreclosures and initiate loan moratoriums. I used this photograph on the "Political Reactions" page of my website because organizations such as these worked to gain attention regarding the hardships of the farm crisis and to influence political action.

Peterson, David. *Century Family Farm.* 1986. Photograph. Pulitzer Prize Farm Crisis Essay Collection, David Peterson Photography, Des Moines, Iowa.

This 1986 photograph from David Peterson's Pulitzer Prize winning collection, showed a family holding a "century farm" sign in the driveway of their rural home on the eve of their eviction due to foreclosure. I used this powerful photo on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website to show the massive loss experienced by generations of farm families during the 1980s farm crisis. The events of this devastating decade extinguished their dream, and that of future generations, for continuing the family farm legacy.

Peterson, David. *Shattered Storefronts*. 1986. Photograph. Pulitzer Prize Farm Crisis Essay Collection, David Peterson Photography, Des Moines, Iowa.

This 1986 David Peterson photograph showed shuttered storefronts that marked the decline of rural communities during the 1980s farm crisis. It was a common sight then and now for rural communities with heavily agriculture dependent economies. I used this photo on the “Dying Dreams” page of my website to show how the farm crisis had a devastating ripple effect on rural America.

Peterson, David. *Thanks Reagan, Farmer Moving South*. 1986. Photograph. Pulitzer Prize Farm Crisis Collection, David Peterson Photography, Des Moines, Iowa.

This 1986 photograph showed a farm trailer loaded with the belongings of a farmer headed south to start a new life. The trailer’s message read, “Thanks Reagan, Farmer Moving South,” which clearly blamed the president’s policies as their reason for leaving. I used this photograph on the “Dying Dreams” page of my website to illustrate the massive wave of out-migration that occurred during the 1980s and contributed to the rapid decline of rural American communities.

Peterson, David. *Town and Country Working Together*. 1986. Photograph. Pulitzer Prize Farm Crisis Essay Collection, David Peterson Photography, Des Moines, Iowa.

This photograph showed a note hung on a storefront door that encouraged people to support their hometown by buying local. It stated that during the trying times they were experiencing, small towns could prevail by supporting each other. I used this photo on the “Dying Dreams” page of my website to show how rural residents worked to slow the loss of rural vitality during the farm crisis.

Peterson, David. *Vogel Family Members during Eviction from Their Farm*. November 8, 1986. Photograph. Pulitzer Prize Farm Crisis Essay Collection, David Peterson Photography, Des Moines, Iowa.

This emotional 1986 photo showed the Vogel family being removed by law enforcement from their farm, which they lost to foreclosure. The white cross in the photo was often seen at farm sales, on courthouse lawns, and at political rallies, to communicate the death of the rural American dream during the 1980s. I used this photo on the homepage of my website because it showed the depth of despair for farm families who lost their livelihoods during this devastating decade.

Porter, Gary. *Farm family youth demonstrates to call awareness to the economic problems facing the family farm*. January 28, 1985. Photograph. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM9267>.

Porter's photograph showed a young farm boy with a sign that said, "My future was... farming," which was intended to raise awareness regarding the long-term impact of economic problems experienced during the farm crisis. For farm children nationwide, the possibility of losing the family farm and their future was a very painful reality. I used this photograph on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to illustrate how people, both young and old, desperately fought to avoid foreclosure and the death of generational dreams for rural Americans.

Progress Made in Tractors. 1964. Photograph. Des Moines Register Photo Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/picture-gallery/money/agriculture/2014/09/12/from-the-archives-iconic-iowa-farm-photos-since-1930/15519849/>.

This photograph showed progress made in tractors during the 20th century between 1913, when the Hart-Parr "60" was created, and 1964 when the Oliver 1600 was built. This progression brought about big changes to the farming industry, as mechanization sparked an increase in farm production, lessened the need for manual labor, and sparked a rural to urban population shift. I used this photograph on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website as a visual example of one change that affected the family farm prior to the farm crisis.

Soybean Field in Coon Rapids, Iowa. 1977. Photograph. Des Moines Register Photo Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/picture-gallery/money/agriculture/2014/09/12/from-the-archives-iconic-iowa-farm-photos-since-1930/15519849/>.

This 1977 photograph showed a combine near Coon Rapids, Iowa, harvesting a soybean crop that failed due to drought. I used this photograph as the header for my website pages because it illustrated the actions of a farmer, on the cusp of the farm crisis, who continued to passionately work the land despite the uncertainty of achieving a profitable harvest.

United States Office Of War Information. *Aftermath of inflation--a foreclosure tale in Iowa in the early 1930s when "the bottom fell out of everything."* Military police were on hand to keep farmers from preventing the auction. c. 1930. Photograph. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017696874/>.

This photograph showed a farm foreclosure sale in rural Iowa during the early 1930s, which was a frequent occurrence during an earlier farm crisis within the Great Depression. Angry farmers and community members gathered at farm foreclosure sales and tried to stop the sales from happening. I used this photograph on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website to show a trend that was common during both farm crises, which brought prompt government intervention during the 1930s, unlike during the 1980s.

Poster

America Has Plenty of Food for Everyone. 1936. Poster. United States Department of Agriculture, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum. Accessed December 17, 2023. <http://www.fdrlibraryvirtualltour.org/page05-05.asp>.

This 1930s U.S. Department of Agriculture poster featured an illustration of a prosperous family farm. It was designed to promote a key piece of President Roosevelt's New Deal policies in 1933, which provided government subsidies for farmers who agreed to reduce production to help regulate surpluses. I used this poster on the "Changes and Challenges" page of my website to demonstrate how government action during an earlier farm crisis helped small family farms recover.

Secondary Sources

Academic Publication

Schmit, Dean. "Someone Was Bound to Crack: Responses to the 1980s Farm Crisis." Thesis. University of Minnesota Morris, 2022. <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=capstone>.

Morris's paper discussed responses to the farm crisis. It had especially good information about the federal government response, or lack thereof, which worsened the situation in the mid-1980s. I used this information on the "Political Reactions" page of my website to show how President Reagan's free market economic policies made things go from bad to worse for the family farmer.

Books

Harl, Neil E. *The Farm Debt Crisis of the 1980s*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990.

Iowa State Agricultural Economist Neil Harl's book provided an excellent analysis of the 1980s farm crisis that included numerous graphs and charts concerning 1980s economic trends. These showed declining net farm income, rising debt, U.S. bank failures, drastic drops in Iowa land values, and more, which helped me better understand the key factors that contributed to the farm crisis. I used a chart from this source on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website because it illustrated a key economic factor that heavily influenced the onset of this detrimental turning point in the rural American way of life.

Metcalfe, Lindsey. *Farmers Unite!* New York City, NY: Calkins Creek, Boyds Mill & Kane, 2020.

Metcalfe's book examined events of the late 1970s when thousands of farmers drove tractors to Washington D.C. in hopes of drawing attention to the failed farm economy and need for government intervention to remedy the situation. The book identified two major organizations, the American Agriculture Movement and Farm Aid, that raised support and funds for struggling farmers. This book helped with information for the "Public Reactions" page of my website and provided useful details regarding the Agriculture Credit Act in 1987, which I discussed on the "Political Reactions" page of my website.

Riney-Kehrberg, Pamela. *When a Dream Dies: Agriculture, Iowa, and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2022.

Pamela Riney-Kehrberg's book was one of the first sources I read and it was fantastic, as it provided a comprehensive and insightful account of the 1980s farm crisis that greatly deepened my overall understanding of this event as a major turning point for agriculture and rural communities. Her book delved into the lives of Iowa farmers and their struggles as they watched their dreams die due to farm foreclosures and bank failures, which also shuttered main street businesses in rural communities and crushed the midwest. Beyond building understanding, this book also pointed me toward valuable primary and secondary sources that aided my research and project development.

Films

Country. Produced by William D. Wittliff. Touchstone Films, 1984.

During the early stages of my project I watched the 1984 film, *Country*, which dramatized the 1980s farm crisis and brought to life its devastating effects on rural farm families. While the film was historical fiction, it was based on actual events, which helped me grasp the personal impact of the farm crisis on the people who were experiencing it, including farmers, their families, bankers, and businessmen. This inspired me to delve deeper into primary source accounts of the farm crisis to capture those personal perspectives and the impact of those experiences for my project.

“The Farm Crisis.” Iowa PBS, 1 July 2013.

<https://www.iowapbs.org/shows/farmcrisis/documentary/5311/farm-crisis>.

Early on in the research process, I watched this fantastic Iowa PBS documentary, which built my overall knowledge concerning this turning point in rural American life and provided many useful leads that aided my continued research. Also, it provided a photograph of a shuttered small town bank that I used on the “Thesis” page of my website to illustrate the devastating, far-reaching effects of the farm crisis on all aspects of rural American life. Additionally, it contained an interview with former U.S. Representative Jim Leach who compared the 1980s farm crisis to one in the 1930s, from which I obtained a quote I used on the “Financial Fallout” page of my website.

Graph

“Number of Farms and Average Farm Size - Iowa: 1950-2014,” pp. 10, Iowa Agricultural Statistics Bulletin, National Agricultural Statistics Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2015.

This graph showed how the number of farms in Iowa dropped from 1950-2014 while the average farm size increased. It also showed how these trends were significantly magnified during the farm crisis, which is why I used this graph on the “Dying Dreams” page of my website.

Journal Articles

Anderson, J.L. "Agrarian Ideals and Rural Realities in *When a Dream Dies: Agriculture, Iowa, and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s*." *The Annals of Iowa*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2023, pp. 117-123.

This journal article described early farming in rural America as an agrarian dream that was shared by thousands of people with farm ownership as a key component. Additionally, the article explained how the rural agrarian dream was one of continuity, with each generation raised to pass the family farm to future generations. This provided useful historical context for my topic that helped me understand the family farm tradition as the rural American dream, which was later compromised by the 1980s farm crisis.

Brasier, Kathryn J. "Spatial Analysis of Changes in the Number of Farms During the Farm Crisis." *Rural Sociology*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2005, pp. 540-560.

Brasier's article provided a statistical analysis of changes in the number of farms during the 1980s. It included many charts and discussion about foreclosure, farm consolidation due to technology change, and proximity of farms to urban centers as factors that played a role in the declining number of family farms. This helped me better understand that the loss of family farms during the 1980s was much more than a gradual continuation of historical consolidation trends; it was a catastrophic event caused by economic factors with devastating consequences for family farmers and rural communities.

Dofner, Kenneth. "Picket Lines, Picket Fences: How Feminism Saved Iowa's Family Farms During the Farm Crisis of the 1980s." *Iowa Historical Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2014.

Dofner's article discussed the key role farm women played through activism during the farm crisis, as they provided a first-hand voice that attracted public attention to the hardships farmers experienced. Unlike men, women more freely shared their experiences and emotions, which was a key factor in drawing attention to and intervention for the mental health issues related to the stress of farm foreclosures. This was a very eye-opening article that caused me to look more closely at examples of women's involvement in the crisis and include some of those on my website.

Eicher, John. "Every Family on Their Own?': Iowa's Mennonite Farm Communities and the 1980s Farm Crisis." *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, vol. 35, 2017, pp. 75-96.

Eicher's journal article discussed the impact of the 1980s farm crisis on Mennonite farmers, who were largely left to navigate the farm crisis on their own because their churches and regional conferences did not have the financial ability to fix their personal economic problems. This article helped me better understand the reach and impact of the farm crisis, which included all demographic groups. It also provided useful details regarding the bank foreclosure process that helped me order information and events on my website.

Foley, Michael Stewart. "'Everyone was Pounding on Us': Front Porch Politics and the American Farm Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s." *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2015, pp. 104-124.

Foley's article discussed grassroots activism among American farmers that started on front porches and at local diners because farmers felt they had been blindsided and wronged by the government. This led to the American Agricultural Movement traveling through Washington, D.C. in a tractorcade, demonstrations of white crosses at courthouses and rallies to symbolize the death of the family farm, and "no sale" auctions to disrupt foreclosures. I used many of these examples of activism on the "Public Reactions" page of my website to illustrate farmers' collective action to draw attention to their plight and promote government intervention.

Lamm, Brian. "An Examination of the Banking Crises of the 1980s and Early 1990s." *History of the Eighties: Lessons for the Future*, vol. 1, 1997, pp. 259-290.

Lamm's journal article discussed how the 1980s farm crisis also created a banking crisis, due to the financial debt farmers incurred after economic and political factors caused an economic free fall. Many banks in rural America suffered along with the farmers and closed their doors as a result of the farm crisis. Additionally, this article included useful graphics regarding the banking disaster that helped me better understand the financial difficulties both bankers and farmers faced during this devastating decade of dying dreams.

Meyer, Katherine, and Linda Lobao. "Economic Hardship, Religion and Mental Health During the Midwestern Farm Crisis." *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2003, pp. 139–55.

Meyer and Lobao's article shared results and conclusions from a study concerning the mental health effects of the farm crisis. One interesting finding they reported was that coping mechanisms had very little effect on farmers' mental health, due to the fact it didn't change their personal economic situations. This demonstrated the widespread nature of mental health issues caused by the farm crisis, which is why I included information concerning this topic on the "Financial Fallout" page of my website.

Soth, Lauren. "Henry Wallace and the Farm Crisis of the 1920s and 1930s." *The Annals of Iowa*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1983, pp. 195-214.

Soth's article discussed an earlier farm crisis during the 1920s and 1930s, which provided helpful data to compare with the farm crisis of the 1980s. This historical context deepened my understanding of significant similarities between the two crises, such as the fact that farmers in both time periods experienced plummeting commodity prices and large surpluses. It was also helpful in identifying the key differences between the two crises, as FDR's New Deal policies worked to rejuvenate the farm economy in the 1930s, whereas government officials' lack of urgency in responding to the 1980s crisis caused more damage for farmers and rural communities.

Stoil, Rebecca Shimoni. "A Critical Intervention: When a Dream Dies, the Farm Crisis, and Historiography." *The Annals of Iowa*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2023, pp. 125-135.

Stoil's article discussed that even though the farm crisis was a major turning point in rural American life, its place in history has often been ignored. During the farm crisis, fifteen percent of family farms that were lost were simply absorbed into corporate agriculture, which overhauled the entire rural American economy and left rural economies in shambles. This information was useful for understanding the historical significance of the farm crisis, as the effects it unleashed on rural communities were difficult to overcome and are still evident throughout the American heartland.

Van Hook, M. "Family Response to the Farm Crisis: a Study in Coping." *Social Work*, vol. 35, no. Sep 90, 1990, pp. 425–31.

Van Hook reported the findings of a study that involved 70 adults from 36 farm families from Sioux County, Iowa, during the farm crisis. It discussed how family members frequently experienced increased stress and depression due to their financial difficulties and were reluctant to reach out for support from others due to feelings of shame. I primarily used this information on the "Financial Fallout" and "Public Reactions" page of my website to show the human side of the farm crisis.

Reports

Hattan, Amy, Andrea Colnes, Curt Grimm, and Nena Stracuzzi, June 2007. *Rural America in the 21st Century: Perspectives from the Field*, Report to the Rural Assembly, Carsey Institute.

The Carsey Institute provided a 2007 report that discussed how rural America was undergoing an economic, demographic, and environmental transformation. It included ideas from three hundred rural leaders throughout the country who gathered to find ways to strengthen rural America through sharing ideas and organizing a national network to advance rural policies. I used a quote from this report on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website that discussed when the people making policy decisions live outside rural America, then rural progress is unlikely to occur.

Stevens, Alexander, Clare Cho, Metin Çakır, Xiangwen Kong, and Michael Boland, June 2021. *The Food Retail Landscape Across Rural America*, EIB-223, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

This Economic Research Service report discussed how grocery store owners and consumers in sparsely populated rural communities faced many challenges as large food conglomerates, located at some distance from rural communities, replaced small, independent, locally-owned grocery stores. I used a graph from this report on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website that showed the decrease in rural grocery stores since the 1980s, which is another indicator of rural decline brought about by the farm crisis.

Speeches

Bush, George H.W. "Signing the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act." Speech presented in the East Room at the White House, 28 November 1990. <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2498>.

President George H.W. Bush, upon signing the 1990 National Affordable Housing Act, noted its similarity to the Homestead Act of 1862 that empowered citizens to escape poverty and attain the American dream through property ownership. I used this quote on the "Family Farms" page of my website because it demonstrated the timeless nature of land ownership, as well as how the family farm and the American dream were woven into the fabric of rural American life.

Grassley, Charles. "Terry Branstad: Longest-serving Governor in History." Speech, 10 December 2015. <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/gov-branstad-longest-serving-governor-us-history>.

Senator Charles Grassley delivered an inspiring address about the longest serving governor in U.S. history, then Iowa Governor Terry Branstad. Much of Grassley's tribute discussed how Branstad, who served as Iowa's governor during the 1980s farm crisis, intervened to aid family farmers and salvage the overall economy during this troubling time for rural America. I used a quote from Senator Grassley's speech on the "Thesis" page of my website. He also inspired me to reach out to Governor Branstad for an interview to learn more about the farm crisis and rural America.

Webinar

Riney-Kehrberg, Pamela. "Iowa History 101: When a Dream Dies: Agriculture, Iowa and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s." Iowa Culture, Des Moines, IA, Sept. 23, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guzZJl7Oa-U&ab_channel=IowaCulture.

Author Pamela Riney-Kehrberg headlined an "Iowa History 101" webinar about the 1980s farm crisis and its impact on farm families and rural communities. Her presentation was extremely helpful in better understanding the political and economic events that prompted the farm crisis, and which created a devastating turning point for farmers and rural communities. Also, during the webinar Riney-Kehrberg shared a dozen letters written to Iowa's governor by farmers, rural citizens, and others, some of which I later located in the archives and discussed in my project to provide different viewpoints on the farm crisis.

Websites

“The Farm Crisis.” Iowa PBS. Accessed November 10, 2023. <https://www.iowapbs.org/shows/farmcrisis/documentary/5311/farm-crisis#:~:text=In%201973%2C%20President%20Nixon's%20Secretary,feed%20the%20world%20was%20on.>

Iowa PBS provided expanded online content concerning their documentary, “The Farm Crisis,” which included transcripts of full interviews with family farmers who experienced foreclosure during the 1980s farm crisis. This provided clarity concerning events and policies of the 1970s that contributed to the farm crisis, which was helpful in developing the “1970s: Boom” and “1980s: Bust” pages of my website.

“Farm Crisis of the 1980s and Iowa’s Economy.” State Historical Society of Iowa. Accessed September 2, 2023. <https://history.iowa.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/farm-crisis-1980s-and-iowa-s-economy.>

The State Historical Society of Iowa website had a section dedicated to the farm crisis with a great deal of useful information that was broken up into helpful categories, such as events that led to the crisis, the height of the crisis, relief efforts, and impact. This greatly aided my overall knowledge concerning the farm crisis, as well as helped me develop a logical organizational plan for my own project website. Also, it contained links to additional resources that provided an important pathway for finding useful primary sources for my project.

“Great Depression.” Ames History Museum. Last modified 2016. Accessed December 10, 2023. <https://ameshistory.org/content/great-depression.>

This Ames History Museum website provided me with great information concerning the 1930s Great Depression era that helped me understand the time period of the 1930s when an earlier farm crisis took place. This provided excellent historical context that I included on the “Changes and Challenges” page of my website, as it explained how the government rallied through New Deal policy to provide relief for farmers during the Great Depression because so many people farmed and the country was united by a common crisis. It also helped me better understand that the reason the government largely ignored the 1980s farm crisis was because it only involved a small segment of society in rural America rather than the country as a whole.

“Historical Highlights of FCA and the FCS.” Farm Credit Administration. Accessed February 18, 2024. <https://www.fca.gov/about/historical-highlights-of-fca-and-the-fcs>.

The Farm Credit Administration website included a timeline of historical events regarding Farm Credit Administration and Farm Credit System programs. It also provided details concerning the 1987 Farm Credit Act, which included important information regarding the provisions of that farm bill that were useful in developing the “Political Reactions” page of my website.

“Keeping Family Farmers on the Land; Our Work.” Farm Aid. Accessed February 4, 2024. <https://www.farmaid.org/>.

This website discussed Farm Aid, an organization started in 1985 by Willie Nelson, Neil Young, and John Mellencamp that hosted charitable rock concerts. Its purpose was to raise awareness and funds to keep farm families on their land. This source had a photograph of the first Farm Aid concert, which I used on the “Public Reactions” page of my website, because the large crowd in attendance showed how effective it was in bringing attention to the farmer’s plight.

“A New Deal: Rural Reforms.” Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed Dec. 17, 2023. <http://www.fdrlibraryvirtualtour.org/page05-05.asp>.

This website provided a great account of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal reforms that helped the American economy (including agriculture) recover from the Great Depression. This provided important historical context about the role government programs play in spurring economic recovery, a factor missing early-on during the 1980s farm crisis. I used a quote from FDR and a net farm income chart on the “Changes and Challenges” page of my website to show how he kept the rural American dream alive for farmers during an earlier crisis.

Schneider, Howard. “Explainer: Past Fed Hiking Cycles, from Sanguine to Severe.” REUTERS. Accessed January 10, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/business/past-fed-hiking-cycles-sanguine-severe-may-say-little-about-this-one-2022-03-17/>.

This article discussed Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volker’s sudden 1970 move to increase interest rates, which had devastating effects for American farmers. It included an interest rate chart from in and around the 1980s, which I used on the “1980s: Bust” page of my website to illustrate the main factor that caused a horrible economic spiral for farmers.

Skelley, Geoffrey. "How Congressional Representation Has Changed over the past 50 Years." UVA Center for Politics. Last modified March 6, 2014. Accessed March 2, 2024. <https://centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/how-congressional-representation-has-changed-over-the-past-50-years/>.

This online article examined shifts in congressional representation over the past fifty years. Not surprisingly, the midwest lost a total of thirty-one seats in the U.S. House of Representative, more than any other region of the United States, due to population loss caused by the farm crisis. I used a graph from this report on the "Dying Dreams" page of my website to show how the massive population shift from rural to urban areas during the 1980s dramatically changed congressional representation in the Midwest, and lessened the influence of rural America concerning issues that directly affect its continued vitality.

Wensley, Sara. "The History - and Future - of American Family Farms." Farm Together. Last modified July 9, 2020. Accessed November 25, 2023. <https://farmtogether.com/learn/blog/the-history-and-future-of-american-family-farms>.

Author Sara Wensley's online article contained substantial information about the role of family farms throughout American history. This helped me better understand not only the origins of the family farm tradition but also how family farms in the 20th century have grown and consolidated due to electrification, mechanization, and advancements in farming methods. It also included many statistics that helped quantify the impact of agriculture on American life, one of which I used on the "Family Farms" page of my website.

"What Is ANF?" Iowa Farm Bureau. Accessed February 2, 2024. <https://www.iowafarmbureau.com/ANF>.

As Iowa's largest grassroots farm organization, the Iowa Farm Bureau worked to aid Iowa farmers during the 1980s farm crisis. The source explained the history behind the Farm Bureau's America Needs Farmers (ANF) campaign that began in the 1980s as a cooperative arrangement between Iowa Hawkeye Football coach Hayden Fry and the Iowa Farm Bureau to advocate for farmers. It also included a photograph showing the ANF logo spelled out by fans in the stadium, which I used on the "Public Reactions" page of my website as an example of collective activism that built support for farmers.