

One of the conditions which vitally affected the development of Wisconsin cooperatives was the shift from wheat farming to dairy farming which took place during approximately the third quarter of the nineteenth century. This change brought with it the need for the rapid development of market outlets for milk and cream, and an opportunity for cooperatives to render a real service to member-dairymen.

The change from wheat to dairying was made easier by the work of several outstanding leaders in the State during this period. In 1872, William Dempster Hoard, a former Governor, was the moving force behind the organization of the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association. He was one of a group of leaders who had become convinced that Wisconsin's financial future lay in dairying rather than in wheat. This idea met with increasing response from farmers after the depression in the early 70's and the plagues of chinch bugs in 1874, '75, and '76, which seriously damaged the wheat fields. Extensive contributions to the dairy program were made by William Aaron Henry of the university, who was instrumental in establishing the Agricultural Experiment Station at Madison. He made pioneer investigations in the feeding of livestock, inaugurated in 1886 the first agricultural short course, and 4 years later organized the first dairy school. Dairying was practically revolutionized by another member of the university faculty, Stephen Moulton Babcock, who in 1890 invented the "Babcock test" to determine accurately and quickly the amount of butterfat in milk. Under the leadership of these

notable men, and many others, Wisconsin became the leading dairy State in the Nation, and a fertile field for the development of dairy cooperatives.

## Grange Fostered Cooperation

The Grange played a very important part in the early development of agricultural cooperatives in Wisconsin as in many other sections of the United States. The grange movement reached Wisconsin in 1871, when the first local unit and the Wisconsin State Grange were organized. By October 1, 1875, the number of subordinate granges was not far from 450 with a membership of more than 17,000.

The farmer-members of many of the subordinate granges put into effect plans for buying farm supplies cooperatively, and some stores were or-



*In the feed warehouse of the Larsen Cooperative Co., Larsen, Wis. This company, which was established more than 20 years ago, has expanded and increased its services several times. It sells for cash, and the management says that while this has made temporary enemies out of a few members, they have nearly always returned as patrons and endorse the cash policy. There are over 700 stockholders. The company grinds feed, and merchandises standard farm supplies, such as tools, oils, paints, harness, etc.*

ganized. The State Grange appointed a State agent in 1871, and in 1876 established a central business agency at Milwaukee. Although these early business enterprises of the Grange declined rapidly in the late 80's, they created a lasting influence because of the valuable experience gained by the farmers in carrying on business cooperatively.

Wisconsin Grangers were greatly interested in the political questions of the day, particularly in those relating to railroads. A bitter fight was waged in connection with the passage of State legislation for the control of the railroads, and later its repeal.

Senator Bob La Follette, Sr., in his Autobiography wrote:

As a boy on the farm in Primrose Township, I heard and felt this movement of the Grangers swirling about me; and I felt the indignation which it expressed in such a way that I suppose I have never fully lost the effect of that early impression. It was a time, indeed, of a good deal of intellectual activity and awakening.

## **Wisconsin Society of Equity Initiated Broad Program**

In the early years of the twentieth century a general farm organization was formed which made an important contribution to the development of cooperation in the North Central States. This was the American Society of Equity. A Wisconsin State Union of the Society was organized in 1903. The major objective of both the national and State organizations was to improve farm prices.

The Wisconsin Society of Equity worked along several different lines. It fostered legislation to provide for the incorporation of cooperative busi-

ness enterprises. It initiated a program of voluntary control of production. It stimulated the organization and development of local marketing and purchasing cooperative associations. The Society built or leased cooperative warehouses for storing farm products so that they might move to market in an orderly manner at times when they could be sold at prices that would mean a fair return to the farmer. "\$1 wheat" and "50-cent potatoes" became popular slogans. Some large-scale cooperative business enterprises were attempted.

In 1911 the Society demanded the enactment of "fundamental cooperative laws so that cooperative enterprises may be organized and incorporated on the basis of 'one-man one-vote'." As a result, the State legislature passed the Wisconsin cooperative statute which provides for democratic control of cooperative business associations.

Efforts to regulate the production of certain crops did not succeed. Some large-scale marketing activities likewise failed. In assisting farmers to form local cooperative marketing associations, however, Equity played an important part. It helped farmers to establish cooperative livestock shipping associations and grain elevators. It built or leased warehouses for the storing of wool, potatoes, and tobacco. Many of the marketing associations established under Equity auspices later discontinued their marketing services and developed the cooperative purchasing of supplies exclusively.

In 1920 there were 400 marketing and purchasing associations which bore the name "Equity." Although the name might be used by any group of farmers, it doubtless is true that a