

Cooperative Extension Centennial Celebration  
Your Trusted Partner... Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

As Cooperative Extension marks 100 years of working for Wisconsin, the following is an excerpt from Cooperative Extension in Grant County – The First Forty Years by Wilfred Pierick, written in 1963.

#### War Takes Effect

World War II placed new demands upon the office of the Cooperative Extension Service. There were demands for increased production of food; a severe shortage of farm labor to contend with; Civilian Defense committees; War Service committees; War Bond drives; the U.S.D.A. War Board; Rationing Boards; anti-inflation programs; and the milkweed program.

#### Farm Labor Activities

Up until the time that Gus Kuenster was hired as farm labor agent in 1944, contending with the problems of farm labor shortages in the county was the job of county agent Wally Voskuil. Voskuil did all he could to distribute and make use of help already available in the county, as there was no possibility of securing outside help. Each community or trade center in the county was assisted in setting up local labor exchanges. Several cities and villages in the county were canvassed for available workers and these workers were then placed where most needed.

Kuenster took over the bulk of this work when he was hired. Besides continuing to work with the labor exchanges in the county, Kuenster made a survey of High Schools in the county to enlist boys willing and able to help with farm work, and in some cases secure temporary releases from school work for this purpose. Kuenster also made all farm investigations required by the local draft boards in Grant county. In 1944 alone, a total of close to 200 workers were placed in one way or another either on farms in agricultural related industries through the efforts of the labor agent.

Outside help became available for corn detasseling work and canning factory work by the years 1944 and 1945. Among the different groups brought into the county were Barbadians, Jamaicans, and German war prisoners.

The University of Wisconsin sponsored a "Labor Caravan" showing models of labor saving devices for use on the farm and in the home in 1945. This was brought into Grant county where it attracted 800 interested spectators.

#### The Milkweed Collection Program

Floss from milkweed pods was needed to make life jackets in World War II due to a critical shortage of conventional life jacket fillers at the time. Rural, parochial, and High School students, 4-H Club members and Scout members all cooperated in collecting milkweed pods in burlap and onion sacks previous to drying and shipment. A total of 19,000 sacks were collected in Grant county under this program which was coordinated through the county agricultural agent.

#### Increased Production Demands

Federal demands for food to support war-time armies provided an impetus for increased production of farm grains, meat, milk, and eggs than ever experienced in American history. From this emerged an agricultural production heretofore undreamed of and evidence of the vast potential now possible because of scientific agricultural production methods and practices.

Price supports during this war period guaranteed farmers of a good market and tended to increase volume of production. Despite labor shortages, increased use of commercial fertilizer, high-yielding and disease-resistant crops, improved mechanization, and efficient livestock production, all combined to meet the call.

Despite the fact that Grant county had no home agent at the time, in 1942, women specialists from the University College were busy in Grant county carrying out a county-wide family nutrition program to aid in the war effort.