

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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IDAHO'S AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, 1908-1929

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Prior to 1919, national agricultural prosperity and state irrigation expansion helped Idaho's farmers gain a reasonably secure position. Idaho's Nonpartisan League, organized by a powerful national farm group from North Dakota, presented a Socialist program in 1918 but failed to gain control of state government during a hotly contested election that led to more than a decade of conservative administration. Administrative reform in 1919 came as a positive result of that political shift.

The repeal of Idaho's direct-primary law forced Nonpartisan League farmers to organize as a Progressive party that left the Democrats as Idaho's third party until 1926.

Agricultural prices collapsed everywhere in 1920-1921, and farm states like Idaho went through a decade of financial disaster and travail before their economic misfortunes grew into a great world depression after 1929. National efforts to solve agricultural marketing problems did not get very far during a time when other segments of the economy enjoyed a period of prosperity, but reclamation projects in Idaho continued to expand. Population growth, however, declined abruptly after a time of spectacular growth between 1900 and 1920.

Idaho followed national trends in many ways aside from farm problems after 1920. Improved communications, particularly in radio and highway development, brought scattered western communities closer to other areas. Airline service, primarily for postal purposes at first, pointed at an even more complete national integration. Farms and cities began to merge in social and cultural orientation, and national fashions and fads reached remote rural communities much more quickly. Automobiles revolutionized life everywhere, in Idaho as much as in any other place. Even though farm depression and discontent had a restraining impact, Idaho investors joined in a national stock market mania until 1929. After that, Idaho's conservative government and traditional reaction to economic problems gave way to a more experimental response for a few years.