The Hardship of Farmers During the Depression

Donald R. Murphy

In the viewpoint that follows, U.S. journalist Donald R. Murphy, writing in 1932, describes the response of Midwestern farmers to more than a decade of falling prices for agricultural goods. Following World War I, as Europe reestablished its agricultural production, U.S. farmers no longer had a market for selling the surplus of goods they had grown accustomed to producing during the war. As a result, the prices of these goods began to decline. Murphy explains the hardship the farmers faced as the price drops grew steeper during the onset of the Great Depression. He also details the Farmers’ Holidays—grassroots strikes organized around the country in an attempt to limit the amount of goods on the market and thus increase the price of goods to a level that covered the cost of production and provided a living wage for the farmers. Donald R. Murphy was a journalist for Midwestern farm papers that catered to the rural reader during the Great Depression. Murphy was also a

On a paved road in northwestern Iowa, a truck loaded with cream cans bowls along. Suddenly a long-chain stretched between two trees bars the road.

From the sides of the highway, where they have been lounging under the trees in the tall grass, a dozen tanned men, the leader waving a red flag, bar the road. There are pitchforks handy for puncturing tires, rocks for cracking windshields, clubs to persuade the truck driver.

“Where you bound?”
“Sioux City.”
“What you got?”
“Cream.”
“Turn around and get outa here. Don’t you know the Farmers’ Holiday is on?”

Usually the truck backs up. Sometimes the driver takes a chance and tries to break through. A few of these chance-takers have finally retreated with broken windshields and punctured tires. The cream has been dumped in the road.

This is a picture of the most dramatic phase of the Farmers’ Holiday—the attempt of a group of Middle Western farmers to enforce a strike designed to stop the movement of all farm products to market.

**Twelve Years of Depression for Farmers**

In a dozen counties in northwestern Iowa, and to a lesser degree in other counties, farmers are picketing the roads and stopping shipments. In several small towns produce buyers have agreed to shut up shop during the holiday. Elevators are considering refusing to buy grain until the holiday is over. Up in the Sioux City area special depu-