



# MINNESOTA AGRICULTURE THROUGH 150 YEARS OF STATEHOOD

During this school year, Minnesota will turn 150 years old. This milestone is called a Sesquicentennial, and it's something to celebrate! Your AgMag will look back at Minnesota's great agricultural heritage in 150 years of statehood.

Long before white settlers arrived and long before statehood, who was here? The answer: Minnesota's first farmers. For hundreds of years the Ojibwe (Anishinabe) and the Dakota Indians had fished, hunted, gathered or tended crops along Minnesota's lakes and rivers. In the early 1820s Fort Snelling was built on the hill where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers meet. The troops needed food, so soldiers became farmers who tilled 200 acres of nearby land for crops.

In 1849 Minnesota Territory was established, stretching west to the Missouri River in what would become North and South Dakota. On May 11, 1858, Minnesota was admitted into the Union as the 32nd state. Newspapers proclaimed a glorious future for the new state. Here are some key events of our first 50 years of statehood when agriculture—food, fiber, forest—led the way!



More than two-thirds of Minnesota was covered with trees when the state's first industry, logging, began. Waterpower from St. Anthony Falls was used for sawmills from the 1840s on, and later for textile and flour mills. By 1880 the power of the Falls—and Minnesota wheat—made Minneapolis the Flour Milling capital of the nation. A year later, Pillsbury's new A Mill was the largest flour mill in the world. Where is St. Anthony Falls?



The Homestead Act of 1862 opened up millions of acres of free land for settlement. To qualify for 160 free acres, settlers had to live on and farm the land for five years. The act brought 75,000 people to Minnesota within three years. Many of the early homes were built of prairie sod. What else can you discover in the photo?



Minnesota's first shipment of spring wheat reached Chicago in 1859—the start of an agricultural export that by 1875 became King. Production grew wildly as new railroads connected farms to inland markets. Between 1875 and 1890 the booming wheat market led to huge farms, especially in the Red River Valley. Investors grew wheat on a grand scale. Their "bonanza farms" covered thousands of acres. Bonanza farms became highly profitable through the use of two things seen in this photo. What are they?



In 1873 grasshoppers darkened the skies of southwestern Minnesota. For the next five summers they stripped the land bare! Charities and the state provide some relief, but many farmers lost everything. *On the Banks of Plum Creek* by Laura Ingalls Wilder describes what it was like for the family. Find and share that passage in class.



George Hormel opened his meatpacking company at the right time: 1891. Corn replaced wheat in some southern Minnesota fields, creating plenty of hog feed. The result was a boom in hog farming and meatpacking. This horse-drawn carriage shows early Hormel products. By 1920, Hormel surpassed the South St. Paul stockyards to lead the state's meatpacking industry. Where is the state's Hormel headquarters?



In 1900, lumbering ruled! Minneapolis was the sawmill capital of the world, cutting enough lumber to fill 65,000 freight cars. Over 40,000 lumberjacks were cutting timber in the north woods. But Minnesota was running out of pine; within twenty years the pine ran out and the lumber industry was all but dead in Minneapolis.

Photos Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



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As the 1900s began, the car and the tractor were among the few modern inventions that seemed like necessities to farmers. Farm kids were milking cows by 6:30 a.m. and walked miles to school. The good things and good times of city life came to Minnesota's farms more slowly than to cities. In the early 1920s too few people lived in rural areas to pay for the costs of bringing electricity there. Then farmers had trouble paying their debts after the boom times of World War I's high food demand ended. In 1929 the stock market crashed and people everywhere lost jobs. In the 1930s, huge dust storms stripped millions of tons of soil from the worn out fields. The Great Depression came to the nation, lasting for more than a decade.

People now saw the need for new farming techniques to protect the soil. Farmers rotated crops, used contour plowing and planted trees to protect against wind damage. World War II again brought demand for everything, and times got better. Soldiers came home to start families and the suburbs were born as builders converted thousands of acres of farmland into neighborhoods of homes. In 1950, more Minnesotans lived in cities than in the country for the first time in our history. What do you know about these key events?

*Photos Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society*



In 1921 General Mills created Betty Crocker as a symbol of the perfect homemaker. This imaginary lady answered letters about baking problems, wrote cookbooks, had a radio show and loaned her name to hundreds of products. Which ones have you enjoyed?



In 1935 the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) brought the conveniences of electricity to farming communities. Not until 1963 did 99 percent of Minnesota farms have electrical service. How did electricity change lives of farm families?



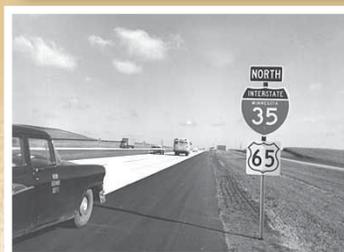
In 1935 protesting farmers brought a starving cow and horse to the steps of the capitol to dramatize the desperate conditions in rural Minnesota. Six years of drought had ruined crops and exhausted the land. Farmers had nothing to sell. No one had much money because of the depression. Banks took away many farms, and others were abandoned.



In 1938 Frederick Jones of Minneapolis invented a refrigeration unit for trucks and trains. People could now eat food transported from great distances and out of season. Jones helped start the Thermo-King Company. What foods do you eat today that probably travel in refrigerated units?



When turkey farmer Earl Olson bought a processing plant in Willmar in 1949, it was the beginning of Jennie-O Foods. By 1999, Jennie-O was known as the world's largest turkey processor. Today, Minnesota farmers raise more turkeys than in any other state.



1956 Congress authorized the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. Eventually, I-35 and I-94 link urban and rural Minnesota. What changes did this bring to both cities and rural areas?

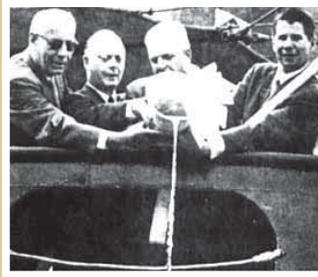
**Sesquicentennial**  
 1858-1908  
 1908-1958  
 1958-2008

# MINNESOTA AGRICULTURE THROUGH 150 YEARS OF STATEHOOD

On May 11, 2008, Minnesota will reach its 150th anniversary as the 32nd state in the United States of America. This milestone is called a **Sesquicentennial**, and it will be a year-long, statewide celebration! This AgMag spotlights a few events of Minnesota's great agricultural heritage in the last 50 years of statehood.

We began the last 50 years of our statehood by celebrating our Centennial in 1958. You read about 100 years of progress and change in the first two AgMags, and it didn't stop there. Modern railways, highways, air routes and two main water routes—the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes—carried millions of tons of Minnesota ag products to consumers around the world. Immigrants still arrived from all over the globe. Many left to escape violence, joblessness or poverty. They came for new opportunities. Some came to join family or friends already in Minnesota. Many moved to small towns and rural areas to work in agriculture. Agriculture changed along with the population, and now we enjoy greater food diversity than ever.

Technology and research are sweeping agriculture into an exciting new future. You read about many of them earlier in this AgMag. Agriculture will continue to be much more than farming. In your future you will surely have some exciting career choices in ag!



In 1959 Duluth became a world port with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway. The Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River now linked our landlocked state to the Atlantic Ocean nearly 2,700 miles away. Today grain, iron ore and coal make up more than 90 percent of total Duluth Seaway Port commerce. The governor used water from the seven seas to christen the opening of the Seaway. Name the seven seas!



Norman Borlaug, a graduate of the University of Minnesota, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for being a leader in the fight against world hunger. Borlaug developed a high-yield, disease-resistant strain of wheat. He is called the father of the “Green Revolution,” which describes a huge increase in food production that helped prevent famine in Asia and developing countries beginning in the 1960s. Why do you think he chose Africa for his focus in the past 20 years?



The mid 1980s brought tough times for farm families when many didn't make enough money to pay their bills and keep their farms. A crowd of 1,200 people held a rally in Worthington to call attention to the growing rate of farm foreclosures and bankruptcies. Store owners, bankers and educators joined farmers at the rally. In what ways is a threat to our farms a threat to all of us?

*Above Photos Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society*



By 2000 over six percent of Minnesota's population was born in another country. Worthington became Minnesota's third most racially diverse city. (Minneapolis is first; St. Paul is second.) What do you enjoy most about the growing diversity? What new foods and flavors have you tasted in Mexican and Thai and Indian restaurants? What new products have you seen at farmers markets? In 1970, U.S. grocery stores sold about 70 types of fruits and vegetables. In 1987 that number rose to 296 types. How do you think the number has changed today? Why?

*Photo Courtesy Minnesota Department of Agriculture*



For well over a century, the University of Minnesota has conducted research to develop new plants that provide food for life. For example, in 1975 U of M geneticists were the first to regenerate corn from tissue culture. Today, much work is being done in the area of renewable energy. Why is energy research important to our daily lives?

*Photo Courtesy U of M Agricultural Experiment Station*