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**"America Needs Farmers," Hayden Fry, and the
Hokey Pokey: University of Iowa Football and the
Farm Community**

During the 1980s, Midwest farmers struggled through grave economic situations comparable to the Depression. Prices for crops and land plummeted while costs of farm operations (i.e., fertilizer, chemicals, fuel, and machinery) and interest rates continued to escalate. Farm debts rose as value of farm assets declined. As a result, thousands of farmers in locales such as Iowa faced economic, and even psychological, peril. Many farmers were forced to leave family farms, unable to pay their large debts.

A number of possible factors contributed to these tragic conditions. Farmers experienced prosperity during the 1970s and many sought to expand their operations during this time period. This expansion process involved purchasing more land and equipment. Land prices were overpriced, however, and when prices fell during the 1980s farmers had to repay loans in a much more difficult climate. Many small towns in Iowa depended heavily on the farm economy to sustain farm-related businesses and thus the community.

While farm communities in Iowa struggled, the University of Iowa football team achieved tremendous success. Iowa had not experienced much football triumph since the days of the legendary Forest Evashevski, however. During a span of seventeen years, the

Hawkeyes did not have a winning season and fired four coaches. Iowa finished the 1978 season at 2-9, the worst record in the five seasons for coach Bob Cummings. Hawkeye fans enjoyed renewed hopes with the announcement of Hayden Fry as new coach in late 1978. Fry made immediate alterations in the football program. He changed the uniforms to model the Pittsburgh Steelers, an NFL power. Fry also introduced "the swarm" where players jogged slowly onto the field prior to the game in a swarm, captains holding hands together in the front. He also helped create the popular Tiger Hawk emblem, had the visiting team locker rooms painted pink, and led the team in "The Hokey-Pokey" after big wins.

This paper examines the relationship between the Iowa football program and the Iowa farm community. Specifically, I examine how the success of the University of Iowa football team in the 1980s impacted the farm community. Those in farm communities and individuals around the state, many struggling with their own achievement and identity, rallied around the success of the Hawkeyes. In exploring this topic, the paper traces a brief history of both the farm economic situation during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as that of the Iowa football program. The topic is important for study in that it helps delineate the relationship between intercollegiate athletic programs and surrounding communities. Further, this bolsters the claim of Michael Oriard that during the twentieth century college football teams "became public symbols of universities, communities, and entire regions in a hugely publicized national drama."
