

*The Collection of Anna Timmerman: "My True Textbooks; Learning Agriculture"*

Anna Timmerman

Through both 4-H and FFA agricultural education programs, I became involved in many projects for various contests and exhibition at the county fair. 4-H and FFA both operate on the principle that members will develop their agricultural knowledge through hands-on activities, such as raising livestock, growing plants, and learning about farming practices. I grew up on the corner of the old family farm, but was one generation removed from the knowledge necessary to become successful in my extracurricular activities. I found it necessary to compensate for knowledge that most kids gleaned from everyday farm life, and chose to do so through books. My projects began small, with a few laying hens and some rabbits. The first books that I purchased on agriculture came from the local feed mill, and have since been passed on to younger members to help develop their interests.

By the end of my senior year, my program encompassed the original poultry and rabbit projects, as well as sheep, swine, cavies, horticulture, crops, and soils. In that time, I had accumulated books to broaden my knowledge, from a variety of sources. Some were purchased at the Groenink's Feed Mill in Nunica, others from the Coopersville library's used book sale and many were gifts given to me by family members still active in production agriculture.

Most volumes predate my birth, but are still relevant in today's agriculture. My oldest book dates back to 1922, and cost the original owner "one dollar- postpaid". I have a signed, first edition copy of *The Prairie Farmer's Poultry Book*, and many books are inscribed with the name of past owners on the cover, including one from my great grandfather Musolff. Most all books contain my name and contact information in them, as an insurance plan for when they were loaned to younger members.

Topics covered in my collection seem broad, but all compose the knowledge necessary for running the organic farm that I owned and operated for six years. Animal care is a popular subject, as I would purchase a book about the next animal I wanted to raise before investing blindly. There are many gardening books, covering vegetables, flowers, and even shrubs. These came in handy for studying for national 4-H horticulture competitions. I also have books covering the fundamentals of sustainable agriculture, as this topic is one that shaped the production practices I implemented. Some books came later, after I moved to college, to support my extensive houseplant collection, and in research for papers and projects.

Contained in three milk crates in my dorm room is the accumulated know-how of twelve years of farming. In preparing to come to college, I debated packing my collection. Within weeks of beginning classes, I was able to reference seven volumes in various projects. Since joining 4-H and FFA, I have never stopped learning about agriculture, and am continuing that process to date here at Michigan State. These are my real textbooks, ones that have and will continue to see practical use each day.

