

## FARMING BIG PICTURE - Farm income fell from \$22 billion in 1919 to \$13 billion in 1929 = Rural Poverty

Farmers had prospered during the war but were among those who suffered most during the boom. The income of farmer was around \$275 per year. (The national average farming income was \$750.) By 1928, half of farmers were living in poverty.

### WHY? - Overproduction + underconsumption + competition from Canada

- They were producing more crops than needed, so prices fell. There were fewer overseas markets because of the **tariff war** and a surplus of food in other countries.
- **Prohibition** led to a 90 per cent fall in demand for barley.
- Changing tastes in food in America meant there was a 25 per cent decline in demand for wheat
- Overproduction and under consumption of agricultural products meant 3 million families earned less than the national average.
- They got into crippling debts which reached \$2 billion in 1929. Many had to sell their farms with roughly 600,000 farmers losing their farms in 1924 alone. Many became hobos who wandered around America looking for any type of work.
- Some tried to survive by using more mechanisation and expanding the acreage they farmed, but this only made the over-production worse.
- Canadian farming was efficient and mechanized and Europe purchased from them as they were cheaper due to US tariffs (Fordney McCumber)

**Not all bad news** - for fruit and fresh vegetable farmers in California (thanks to refrigeration)

## Did all Americans benefit from the boom?

### BIG PICTURE

For many Americans, the 1920s was a decade of poverty. More than **60 per cent** of Americans lived just below the poverty line. 5% of the population owned 33% of the wealth,

### Coal, Shipbuilding and Cotton

**Coal** - less demand and was being replaced by oil. Railway also reduced in demand (cars) so less coal for engines. Homes heated by oil - replacing coal. In 1929 a coal miners wage was barely a third of the national average income

**Shipbuilding** - slumped after demand of WWI. Exports down (tariffs) less demand for merchant shipping.

**Cotton + Textiles** - replaced by RAYON - cheaper and more variety. In Tennessee textile workers worked 56 hours for 18 cents an hour!



**Women** - whilst there were many gains, most management jobs remained male dominated. Women in employment increased by 2 million but that was still only 24% of the workforce (1 in 4). Post WWI there was a lot of pressure to return to pre war expectations- a woman's place was in the home. Women faced much hostility from male trade unions. There was inequality of pay and lack of job security - advancement in professions such as law

**Immigrants** - Existing immigrants provided much of the backbone of the labor force in manufacturing, construction and mining but immigration laws, aided by a resurgence of nativism in America in the 1920s, contributed to an atmosphere hostile to immigrants. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 discriminated against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

The National Origins Act of 1924 completely excluded Japanese and other Asian immigrants and further reduced those admitted from southern and eastern Europe. Those in employment experienced low wages, poor job security and discrimination. Half the workforce was in either agriculture or manufacturing which saw low pay and management jobs firmly in the hands of native born white men.

**African Americans** - were paid less for the same job as a white person (Average annual income in New York \$890 compared to \$1,900 for a white family). 1 million black farm workers lost their jobs in the 1920s. Black workers in the towns in the north were the lowest paid; the only work they found available were low-paying, menial jobs. New York's black Harlem district was a severely overcrowded and segregated community, with more than 250,000 citizens crammed into an area 50 blocks long and eight blocks wide. Many of these people had to sleep in shifts, going to bed when others went off to work. 'Rent parties' were common on Saturday nights, to raise money to pay the landlord on Sunday

In the Southern states Jim Crow segregation laws were in place - little change to their social or economic position - forced millions to migrate north to low paid menial jobs in overcrowded living conditions. e.g Harlem.