

Blanche Corwin

FIRST VOICE (female):

Hello, my name is Blanche Corwin, and I'm the Home Demonstration Agent for Montgomery County - that means I work with women, mostly farmers' wives and daughters, to help them improve their gardens, housekeeping and cooking, kind of like having an advice columnist right on your doorstep.

The Great Depression has been particularly hard on our county's farmers and their families. Agriculture can be an expensive business, and many farmers are having trouble paying their mortgages, maintaining their equipment, and buying necessities. Some people have even had to sell their livestock, which in good times is their source of income. I knew that there must be a way for these women I work with to help support their husbands and families. Looking around the county, I noticed that areas like Rockville and Bethesda were still going strong, thanks to all the new people moving here to work for President Roosevelt's government. I thought, instead of staying on their farms, why shouldn't these ladies bring their farm produce to these suburban folks in Bethesda?

Some people found the idea of women actively marketing farm products outrageous. Men were supposed to be the ones dealing with the business side of farming. But the men were needed on the farms themselves, and the women I worked with wanted to do something to help their families. Soon I had nineteen ladies willing to sell their produce, baked goods, and crafts. We rented an empty storefront on busy Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda, and held our first Farm Women's Market on February 2nd, 1932.

The Market was an immediate success and now, in the summer of 1932, the Bethesda Farm Women's Market is going strong. We now have thirty-one women involved, and even more on a waiting list. The money the market brings in has helped pay mortgages, buy necessities, and put food on the table; one woman has even started saving up for a new car. By pulling together, pooling their resources, and striking out on their own, the farm women of Montgomery County are able to keep their families going in these times of hardship.

SECOND VOICE (male):

The Montgomery Farm Women's Cooperative Market was founded by Blanche Corwin and a group of county farm women in 1932 as a way of supplementing their families' incomes during the Great Depression. The women fought against gender discrimination in their efforts to create the market; local newspapers, politicians, bank managers, and even their own families found the idea of women going into business a shocking one, and doubted that the venture would succeed. The women proved the naysayers wrong, and today the farm market is still going strong, in the same location on Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda.

To learn more about Blanche Corwin and what it was like to live in Montgomery County during

the Great Depression go to www.montgomeryconnections.org.