

Agriculture and industry in america, 1789-1840

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



In the early years of the American republic, agriculture and industry had a somewhat ambiguous relationship. While the two often supported each other's development, they also attracted support from opposing political factions and seemed at odds during the United States' early history. The conflict between them dates to the republic's creation, particularly to the political clashes between Thomas Jefferson and Treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton. These two figures had sharply different views of what direction the new nation should take.

Jefferson, a Virginia planter who embraced broad democracy, advocated a primarily agrarian nation of farmers and artisans and urged westward migration as a way to broaden agriculture. This scheme drew support from farmers and especially Southern planters, who already despised Hamilton and his Northern urban backers (Wikipedia, "Alexander Hamilton"). On the other hand, Hamilton, a New York lawyer and merchant with strong elitist leanings, had a perhaps more realistic economic vision.

He wanted the new federal government to help financiers and large merchants, thus creating an economy based on manufacturing, trade, and finance- basically, an industrial nation instead of an agrarian one. Jefferson opposed this on political grounds, believing that the United States needed landowning citizens in order to maintain democracy; if Hamilton's plan succeeded, he claimed, the United States would be a society of poor, propertyless laborers without political freedom (Wikipedia, "Alexander Hamilton").

Despite the political battles over them, American agriculture and industry grew together and supported one another. Initially, agriculture suffered as a

<https://assignbuster.com/agriculture-and-industry-in-america-1789-1840/>

result of Hamilton's policies. As farming families moved westward in large numbers, established Eastern farming communities suffered from loss of labor; this was further exacerbated as rural people moved into towns in search of work. As a result, farmers were forced to change their methods in order to keep their farms viable.

However, they faced pressures from planters who wanted western lands for slavery-based plantations, not for yeoman farmers, who would later form the basis of the Free Soil movement and Republican Party (Wikipedia, "United States History"). Industry, meanwhile, boomed under Hamilton's financial guidance, thanks to credit and technological innovation. Factories rose along the Eastern seaboard, especially in river towns where water power could be easily harnessed. Farmers were increasingly oriented toward producing raw materials (like hides) for manufacturers, merging the rural and urban as never before.

This included Southern plantations, which turned to cotton production after the cotton gin was invented in 1793, making cotton processing much more efficient. In return, though, industry provided agriculture with devices that could increase productivity, such as the cotton gin, steel plows, and reapers. Though agriculture was extremely important to the American economy, it had been given subordinate political status since Hamilton and political power was firmly on industry's side, since manufacturing and finance were more profitable and influential.

Also, the industrial North, which depended on free labor, grew increasingly critical of the South's dependence on slavery. Meanwhile, pro-slavery Southerners saw the factory system as little better than slavery, since few

employers paid workers well or were concerned with their employees' well-being. Urban slums grew near factories by the 1830s, often housing recent immigrants living in squalid conditions (Wikipedia, " United States History"). To rural people, the manufacturing city seemed shabby, poor, and sinful, while the countryside seemed to evoke purity and morality.

The city, meanwhile, grew in importance by 1840 - not only established Eastern cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, but " western" cities like Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, which became regional manufacturing and financial centers. Though Western migration initially hurt Eastern farms, it also helped agriculture because it opened new lands for cultivation. Also, agriculture gained from industry because the latter provided farm implements and improved transportation (steamboats, canals, and railroads), helping Western farmers ship their goods to Eastern markets more quickly and efficiently.

However, farmers by 1840 came to resent manufacturers' affluence, which rose during the 1820s and 1830s beyond what even the most prosperous farmers were earning. This was partly because landless farmers and farm laborers did not share in the new wealth. Also, American agriculture was divided by slavery; free Northern and Midwestern farmers came to oppose Southern planters' political influence and aims to expand westward, while planters were increasingly isolated from the industrial-agricultural alliance which formed in the North (Wikipedia, " United States History").

On the whole, American industry and agriculture had a decidedly mixed relationship between 1789 and 1840. Agriculture and industry helped each other by providing necessary goods, but they vied for political influence, <https://assignbuster.com/agriculture-and-industry-in-america-1789-1840/>

which generally leaned toward industry. Also, agriculture was divided between dependence on slavery and free labor, diminishing agriculture's social and political unity and thus diminishing whatever political influence it could have attained.

The relationship between industry and agriculture was often contentious, but their interdependence was very definite and solid by 1840.

SOURCES

Anonymous. " Alexander Hamilton. " Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. 11 July 2005. . " History of the United States (1789-1849). " Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. 11 July 2005. < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States_%281789-1849%29>.