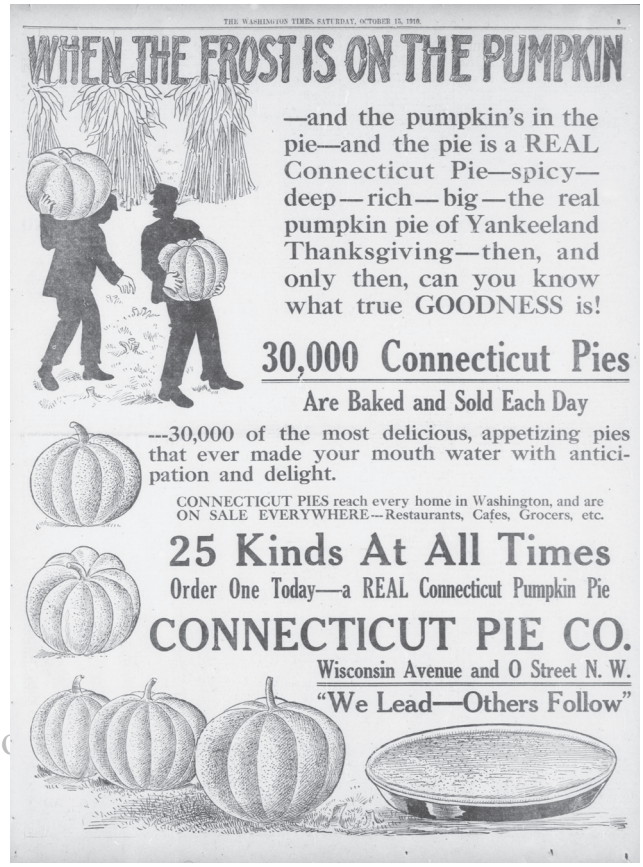
of wild nature and rural life, and it confirmed the power of pumpkins to fulfill these desires.

Going out and buying pumpkins became as much a part of the seasonal ritual as putting them on display. John Arata's story about selling pumpkins to "well-dressed men" who happened by his family's northern California farm, which began this chapter, sounds like a rarity, but it was not. Similar incidents happened across the country as consumers' demand for fresh pumpkins for the holidays grew and their ability to find them in urban markets diminished. By the 1930s, in New York City, it was probably easier to find a pumpkin in a can than fresh from the vine. According to the *New York Times*: "A survey of the markets might give the impression that pumpkins and cranberries are disappearing. . . . John Egan, who regularly solves such mysteries for the Department of Markets, [explains] 'pumpkins are heavy to ship and take up a lot of room. If there is room on a truck and there are any pumpkins around, they'll put them on the load. But you won't find that many, even around Thanksgiving.'"[61]

Unless, that is, you got in your automobile and headed to the country. The 1910 ad for the Connecticut Pie Company, which shows two men hauling off pumpkins from a cornfield, depicts the classic rustic scene, but businessmen in suits and fedoras replace the farmers in straw hats and overalls. The scene is indicative of the turn in the pumpkin market. As early as 1904, a Michigan state booster optimistically viewed the pumpkin as a key tourist attraction. He asked, "Why not bring renown to Michigan as the 'Land of the Pumpkin Pie?' True, Nebraska is the home of the genuine corn-fed girl, and Kansas is not without glory as the home of the grasshopper; but to have it broadly known that Michigan is the 'Land of the pumpkin pie,' would bring tens of thousands of tourists to our State every autumn."[62]

Unable to compete with the wholesale prices offered by large-scale farms or to afford the prices demanded by rail and shipping companies, some farmers in the early twentieth century began to turn to direct marketing techniques, such as the use of roadside stands, to cut out the middlemen and salvage their family businesses. As many direct farm marketing guides explain, the keys to success were proximity to a large population center and an effective enticement.[63] Contributing to the development of roadside stands in the twenties, thirties, and forties was the proliferation of automobile tourism and the persistent interest in



"When the Frost is on the Pumpkin," advertisement for the Connecticut Pie Company, Washington, D.C., in the *Washington Times,* October 15, 1910. Urbanites' demand for pumpkins for holiday rituals and food helped spark a new form of rural economic development—roadside farm stands.

native rural culture, as exemplified in art and photographs of the time. Concomitant with vast road improvements and construction, the number of automobiles increased exponentially with every passing year.[64] Buoyed by more disposable income and more free time, many Americans hit the road. While national park tours and cross-country road trips made popular summertime vacations, many people also piled into their new sedans for weekend trips to the country.[65]

Often with no clear destination in mind, families toured the countryside to take in the rural scenery. One 1940s American regionalist–style landscape painting portrays a large sedan pulling a camper along a rural road, with picturesque, rolling farmland and a quaint little farmhouse serving as the backdrop. Such places were tourist attractions. In *Middletown*, their study of Muncie, Indiana, Robert and Helen Lynd reported

that the "local paper estimated in June 1935 that 10,000 persons leave Middletown for other towns and resorts every fine Sunday."[66] They noted that these "all-day Sunday motor trips" were important for residents who did not have extended vacations and that some considered these jaunts "a threat against the church."[67] Most people sought not just geographical distance from home but also a less tangible separation or respite from their daily lives in and around urban centers. The automobile gave Americans greater access to and freedom to visit once remote places and people.

Tourists' presence in the countryside propelled the very forces of capitalist consumer culture that city folk were trying to escape and thereby altered the landscape to fit their expectations and desires.[68] Farm families were among a large cadre of entrepreneurs who seized the opportunity to serve the growing numbers of weekend vagabonds. James Agee's "The Great American Roadside," an article in the October 1934 edition of *Fortune*, described this new phenomenon. He called roadside businesses "an American institution which is also a $3,000,000 industry, and which is founded upon a solid rock: the restlessness of the American people."[69] Gas stations, eateries, and motels all offered their own sorts of enticements, which they advertised with increasingly elaborate signage, from giant ice cream cones to massive teapots. A 1929 Massachusetts Department of Agriculture survey of 2,500 consumers indicated that more than 60 percent of the respondents stopped at roadside farm stands because of the displays.[70]

Roadside farm stands served a particular market niche by offering customers not only fresh fruits and vegetables at decent prices but also a chance to interact with local farmers. "For years it has been custom," noted the author of *Meet the Farmer* in 1944, "to stop once each trip at a little roadside stand run by a farmer, to pick up fresh eggs, vegetables, and poultry."[71] Early on, regulators tried to ensure that farm stand operators were indeed the farm proprietors, and they discouraged the sale of nonfarm items such as sodas and cigarettes, presumably to sustain a sense of authenticity.[72] New Jersey, for example, required that operators produce 60 percent of the merchandise sold at the stand.[73] Farmers established cooperative roadside associations, and publications from *Economic Geography* to *First Principles of Cooperation in Buying and Selling in Agriculture* described the stands' economic benefits for small-scale producers.[74] One such publication stated specifically that a New York state farmer's

roadside stand had lifted his farm out of the doldrums and helped sustain his operations.[75]

The changes wrought by the new road culture on farm communities inspired a melancholy poem from Robert Frost, who is known for his reverence for the New England countryside and his deep sense of rural nostalgia. Written in 1936, during the height of the Great Depression, the poem "A Roadside Stand" portrays the farm stand enterprise as a confrontation between struggling yet sympathetic farmers and greedy and overprivileged urbanites. He wrote:

> Here far from the city we make our roadside stand,
> And ask for some city money to feel in hand,
> To try if it will not make our being expand,
> And give us the life of the moving pictures' promise. . . .
> The sadness that lurks near the open window there,
> That waits all day in almost open prayer,
> For the squeal of brakes, the sound of a stopping car,
> Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass,
> Just one did stop, but only to plow up the grass.[76]

Frost laments the roadside stand as American farmers' tragic attempt to survive against economic forces and ways of life that seem antithetical to their humble rural existence. His pessimism reflects the deep desire that many people felt (and that he was famous for writing about) to hold onto a more traditional, farming way of life in America. Few practicing farmers, of course, have ever thought of themselves as anachronisms; instead, they have sought ways to modernize and improve their businesses. Although it might seem paradoxical, many of them did just that by taking advantage of the American public's nostalgia for the quaint family farm of lore.

Farmers offered all types of produce for sale, but the pumpkin proved a particularly strong enticement because it was such a potent symbol of both the old-fashioned farm and virile nature. Countering Frost's forlorn perspective on the rise of farm stands, a children's tale from 1937 adapted the old agrarian myth to accommodate the pumpkin roadside stand. In *Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Grower,* by Florence Bourgeois, a boy named Peter plants pumpkins and then creates a farm stand where people stop to buy them. He uses the money he earns to buy a bicycle. The book translates

the age-old myth of the American yeoman farmer, in which a strong work ethic brings due rewards, to the new economic opportunity offered by the roadside stand.[77] By choosing the pumpkin to make her point, the author used one of the most popular and recognizable symbols of rural virtue, thereby communicating the idea that these old values could stay intact as the world changed.

Alongside the FSA's more famous images of California farm immigrants and midwestern tenant farmers is a photographic series depicting New England roadside pumpkin stands that reinforces Bourgeois's point. Whereas the focus in the early years of the FSA program was on the hardships of the rural poor (which were also evident in Frost's poem), as World War II approached, the emphasis changed to more optimistic subjects. In a letter to his staff of photographers in 1941, Roy Stryker, the head of the agency, instructed: "Please watch for autumn pictures, as calls are beginning to come for them and we are short. These should be rather the symbol of Autumn . . . cornfields, pumpkins. . . . Emphasize the idea of abundance—the 'horn of plenty' and pour maple syrup over it."[78] In response, photographers John Collier and Russell Lee captured images of farm stands heaped high with piles of pumpkins and squashes. Ironically, many of the photographs were shot in New England, where pumpkin production was meager in comparison with that of other regions but which had a large, concentrated population of urban consumers.[79] These "wayside harvest stands," as the artists identified them, were eye-catching sites of agrarian splendor. Mounds of field pumpkins, crates of crooknecks, and bins of gourds and other squashes enticed the caravans of travelers who passed before them. Unlike the spotless and stylized way in which pumpkins are displayed at stands nowadays, these appear nicked, scraped, and haphazardly piled, suggesting that farmers had not yet begun breeding varieties exclusively for display.

Several photographs document the great draw that these rustic marketplaces had for urbanites. Many are crowded with women in heels and men in suits perusing the fall produce. In one photograph in a series labeled "Farmers along the Mohawk trail in Massachusetts depend on the tourist for much [of] their profit," a farm woman dressed in a simple seedcloth dress and apron stands beside a customer in her Sunday finest who inspects the pumpkins and gourds before her.[80] The two women stand as stereotypes of old and new ways of life—the rural producer and the

Russell Lee (American, 1903–1986), "Roadside Stand near Greenfield, Massachusetts," 1939. Black-and-white film. This image is part of a Farm Security Administration photographic series featuring New England roadside pumpkin stands. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection LC-USF33-012448-M4.

urban consumer. The photograph "Sales Promotion at a wayside harvest market" depicts a long-retired Model A with a family made of pumpkins seated inside it.[81] Set beside the road, it is a caricature of the new breed of tourists who clambered their way into the countryside. Another, more picturesque roadside attraction is an old farm wagon piled with pumpkins that recalls nineteenth-century harvest paintings.[82] It is suggestive of the ways tourists were offered a piece of Americana along with vegetables for pies. Farmers used historic motifs as enticements for urban visitors to the countryside, and the photographers exploited these themes to their own ends.

Another new tradition drawing crowds of thousands to the countryside was the pumpkin festival. A "pumpkin show" was now considered an

Untitled Farm Security Administration photograph labeled "Farmers along the Mohawk trail in Massachusetts depend on the tourist for much [of] their profit," made between 1935 and 1942. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection LC-USF34-081646-D.

old-time county agricultural fair—sometimes called a "pig and pumpkin show"—in contrast to larger state fairs that displayed the latest innovations in the mechanical arts alongside agricultural products.[83] What is interesting about the fairs devoted to modern innovations and the festivals that celebrated the pumpkin is that they arose out of the same trend. In other words, the pumpkin festival is not a remnant of an historical agrarian tradition. Pumpkins were nowhere to be found at colonial and nineteenth-century harvest festivals. The pumpkin festival got started just when an agrarian way of life seemed to be disappearing.

The Circleville Pumpkin Show, in Ohio, was first held during the third week of October in 1903.[84] Displays of corn fodder and assortments of pumpkins marked the early events, which organizers intended "to get

"Circleville Pumpkin Show—1910." Black-and-white film. The Circleville, Ohio, Pumpkin Show has been held the third week in October since 1903. Pickaway County Historical Society, Circleville, Ohio.

the country folks and city folks together . . . so the city folks would be able to appreciate their efforts."[85] Yet modern food technologies, not just old agricultural practices, inspired the festival. Circleville was home to the C. E. Sears Canning Company, which began processing and packing pumpkins, corn, and other vegetables in 1873. During the fall packing season, Circleville streets were lined with long columns of horse-drawn wagons, all loaded with pumpkins that farmers brought to town for processing.

The Depression, a drought, and the closure of the canning factory all took their toll on the community and threatened the survival of the Pumpkin Show. During World War II it was cancelled altogether. In the late 1940s, even as many farmers moved off their land to seek opportunities in nearby Columbus and beyond, the Pumpkin Show reemerged on

Circleville's yearly calendar, and it has continued as an annual tradition ever since. Circleville was only the first of many rural communities to renew its local identity and its prosperity with the pumpkin and thereby defy the dire predictions of economic demise. Ironically, the expanding consequences of corporate capitalism, including increased wealth, technological innovations, and, adversely, economic pressures on small family farms and rural towns, made pumpkins profitable and pumpkin stands and festivals abundant. As insightful as John Arata's father was in the 1930s about a future in pumpkins, he probably could not have imagined that one day his children and grandchildren would grow something called a "specialty pumpkin" and that thousands of tourists would pay up to $15 each just to visit the family pumpkin farm.[86]