
CULTIVATING THE LAND

From the mid to the late 19th century Ripon transformed into a agricultural hub. The City served as a vital trade center, leveraging nearby water sources and fertile land to support the region's agricultural economy. Railroad lines through Ripon contributed materially to to the City’s growth and prosperity.

THE WHEAT ERA AND SOIL DEPLETION

In the 1840s, the first white settlers of what is now Ripon initially focused their attention on the immediate wants of food, shelter, and clothing. They had to struggle for livelihood in the face of great difficulties. But over the course of the next decade Ripon grew rapidly.

- By the 1850s, Fond du Lac County was in cultivation. The first main cash crop was wheat.
- By 1860 Ripon had grown rapidly, with a population of over 2000. Railroad and telegraph connection had been secured with Milwaukee and the Ripon & Wolf River Railroad as far as Omro.
- Wheat was shipped from the Ripon station at a rate of 350,000 bushels per annum.

DIVERSIFICATION

Wheat production fell off drastically in the 1870s due to soil exhaustion and competition. Farmers moved away from monoculture toward dairying, livestock, and produce.

- **FEED CROPS:** Oats, corn, and hay – replaced wheat as the state’s agricultural backbone.
- **DAIRY FARMS:** Dairying became one of Ripon’s most important industries. The Amend Creamery was established in 1870 and, in 1909, merged with a business run by Louis Pynch to become the Ripon Produce Co. This line of business operated until 1914, when Horace Bumby became involved. Bumby further developed the dairy line as Ripon Milk Co. and then Ripon Dairy Co. in the late 1920s. In the 1930s, it was reported in the Ripon Commonwealth Press that the Ripon community consumed 25,000 quarts of milk daily.
- **PRODUCE:** The pioneers planted apple, peach, plum, cherry trees, and grapes. The hardiest of varieties proved best for surviving the harsh winters. Around 1870 Jacob Woodruff and son began planting blackberries, eventually expanding to eight acres of blackberries. Small fruit growing proved profitable for Ripon. In 1890, fruit growers formed into an association known as the Ripon Fruit Growers Association for the purpose of better shipping facilities, establishing fair market prices for their fruit, and establishing industry growth.

The pickle and sauerkraut industry in Ripon, WI, grew from the region's rich agricultural transition away from wheat in the 1870s. While other Wisconsin towns focused on kraut, Ripon developed a legacy built on commercial pickling, relishes, and broad-scale vegetable canning.

- **LIVESTOCK:** The region has a history of specialized farming, including sheep breeding, with farmers in the nearby Green Lake area raising prize-winning Corriedale sheep in the mid-20th century.

