# William Henry Hatch Biography

## William Henry Hatch

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# Biography

William Henry Hatch (1833-1896), American reformer, sponsored the Hatch Act of 1887, which gave Federal aid to agricultural research.

William Hatch was born in Scott County, Ky., on Sept. 11, 1833, the son of a pioneering Protestant (Campbellite) minister. Called to the bar at the age of 21, Hatch moved to Hannibal, Mo. There he became a noted lawyer, joined the Democrats, and was elected a circuit attorney (1858-1862).

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Hatch joined the Confederate forces. He returned to Hannibal to practice law after the war. Following the defeat of the Radical Republicans in 1871, he began seeking elective office in Kentucky. He became the Democratic congressman for the solidly agricultural First District in 1878, thereafter winning eight successive 2-year terms.

Hatch's influence in Congress was exerted mainly through his chairmanship of the Committee on Agriculture. He was defeated for the Speakership in 1892 and never achieved his ambition of becoming secretary of agriculture, though he successfully led the movement to raise that post to Cabinet rank (1889).

Hatch's pure-food reforms included the Bureau of Animal Husbandry Act of 1884; the first Oleomargarine Act of 1886 (which brought Federal inspection of margarine production and earned him the nickname "Bull Butter Hatch"); the Meat Inspection Act of 1890; and various measures to check grain speculation, to control the "tobacco trust," and to establish national standards of hygiene in the control of communicable animal diseases.

"Farmer Bill" Hatch made his greatest contribution to American agriculture with the Hatch Act of 1887. This gave direct Federal support to each state and territory for agricultural experimental stations closely associated with the Morrill land-grant colleges. The agricultural colleges were suffering from low enrollments, poorly trained faculty, and bad morale owing to the relatively undeveloped state of the agricultural sciences in the United States. The Hatch Act brought immediate improvement: 50 or 60 research stations were eventually created, and their discoveries helped revolutionize American agriculture and the life of the farmer. The colleges grew rapidly after 1887, and it was soon taken for granted that Federal and state governments should work together in a national system of agricultural teaching, research, and (later) extension education work. The Office of Experimental Stations was created in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1888.

Defeated for reelection in 1894, Hatch retired to his farm in Hannibal, where he died on Dec. 23, 1896.