W. R. MOTHERWELL
And The Dry Farming Congress in Canada

by R. Bruce Shepard

His Saskatchewan farm is now a national historic site, and his name once graced a federal government office building in the provincial capital. W. R. Motherwell has been justly honored for his accomplishments, as well as for the symbolic value of his life and work. As an eastern Canadian who successfully farmed on the Canadian Plains, and as a Liberal politician, he has come to epitomize a nationalist interpretation of the settlement and development of the region.

Yet the Great Plains are a harsh and demanding environment which can quickly turn fanciful theories into dust. W. R. Motherwell, like others of his generation, quickly learned that living successfully on North America’s Plains required changes in thought, particularly about farming practices. He also learned that, despite lingering nationalist reservations, the adjustments were aided by borrowing freely from the previous American experience of developing a society upon the Grasslands.

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Even though he was not a native of the plains, William Richard Motherwell was destined to occupy a central place in the dry farming movement in Canada. Born in Perth, Lanark County, Canada West (soon to become the Province of Ontario) on 6 January 1860, he was educated in that community, and at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph. In 1882 he moved west and homesteaded near Abernethy, north of the Qu’Appelle Valley and the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) mainline. Motherwell was active in farmers’ movements in what was then the North-West Territories, and in 1902 was elected as the first president of the Territorial Grain Growers’ Association. When the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were created in 1905, Motherwell ran as a Liberal in the first Saskatchewan election of that year in the constituency of North Qu’Appelle. Elected, he served in the Saskatchewan legislature from 1905 until 1918. Motherwell became the first Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, and held that portfolio until he resigned in 1918. He then sought the federal seat of Assiniboia in 1919, but was defeated. He tried again in the Canadian general election of 1921, and this time was successful. He was named federal Minister of Agriculture that same year, and served in that capacity until 1930. On 24 May 1943 he died in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Motherwell was one of the many eastern Canadian immigrants to the Canadian Plains who initially sought to make the area a new version of Ontario. Motherwell built himself a handsome fieldstone house, characteristic of his home province. He surrounded it with gardens, hedges, and trees in an attempt to re-create the environment of the east, and named it Lanark Place, after his home county. In his fields, though, Motherwell soon became a plainsman, quickly converting to the agricultural practices of his district. It was while he was still actively farming and serving as a provincial politician, that Motherwell became involved with the Dry Farming Congress.

The farmers of the Indian Head, Saskatchewan area, which included Abernethy, made extensive use of summerfallowing. In fact, they claimed to have invented the practice in 1885, stumbling upon summerfallowing accidentally because of the Northwest Rebellion. The farmers had suffered through several years of drought prior to the Rebellion, and the conventional eastern Canadian techniques they were using were not helping them. The farmers had just begun their spring plowing when the Rebellion broke out. They abandoned their fields before seeding when General Middleton requested their help in freighting supplies northward to Batoche. By the time the farmers returned with their teams in the fall it was too late to seed, and they left the fields fallow for a year. Normal seeding resumed in 1886, although it too was a dry year. Yet the fields which had been left fallow the year before yielded much better than the fields which had been cropped, and the farmers decided to continue the practice, or so the story goes.

The practice was then spread on the Canadian Plains, in part because of the efforts of Angus MacKay. Born in Pickering, Canada West, in 1840, like Motherwell he had come west in 1882. He established a large farm near Indian Head along with three partners. A year after his return from freighting to Batoche, MacKay observed how much better his own and neighboring crops were doing on the accidentally summerfallowed land. He conducted experiments of his own, but his major effort to promote the technique began when he was appointed Superintendent of the Indian Head federal Experimental Farm in 1888. MacKay used his position to conduct additional experiments on summerfallowing, and to lecture widely on the subject.

While summerfallowing may have been independently “unearthed” by farmers in Indian

4. Inglis, op. cit., 7-10.
Head, the story of this important discovery soon assumed mythological proportions. Like all good myths the tale contains a sufficient amount of truth to make it credible. There is no reason to doubt that farmers in the area stumbled upon the practice accidentally, as they said. Add to this the association with the Riel Rebellion, one of the singular events in the history of western Canada, and you have the required element of romance. Furthermore, the discovery was made by ordinary people, and this adds a touch of popular appeal. Still, while all of this makes for a good story, or yarn, what promotes it to the status of myth is its utility. What the myth of summerfallowing really represents is the conquest of the Canadian Plains by Ontario immigrants; its usefulness is as a minor bond of Canadian Confederation.  

There is sufficient evidence to undermine the myth, and reveal that it was at best a case of independent invention. The American systematic agriculturalist, Hardy Webster Campbell, included the practice in his approach to plains agriculture at approximately the same time as the Indian Head farmers claimed to discover it. In addition, the "Bonanza farmers" in the Red River Valley of Minnesota and the Dakotas were using the technique in the 1880s, at the same time as it was supposedly being discovered in Canada. The practice had apparently been known in the valley for some time, since in 1884 Manitoba had more than 45,000 acres in fallow.  

The Canadian claims of discovery were amusing to Americans who knew otherwise. Emil Julius Melilicke, a German born American who had farmed in Wisconsin and Minnesota before homesteading near Dundurn, Saskatchewan, recalled his response to the Canadian myth in his autobiography. Melilicke stated that,  

Nearly all the farmers who came in knew how to farm under dry conditions. We had learned to plough when the soil contained moisture, and to summerfallow and cultivate the surface. We used to smile when the Canadians told us that this system was a wonderful discovery of theirs. We knew it in Germany, and it was an old story. I was sent by the Provincial Government as a delegate to the Dry Farmers' Congress at Spokane in 1910 ... I had to smile at all the talk of the wonderful discovery of dry farming, especially when a Frenchman from Algeria told them in a lecture that dry-farming had been practiced in that country for centuries.  

American farmers had developed a way of farming on the Great Plains which included crop rotation, alternate year cropping, deep plowing, and repeated surface cultivation to preserve a surface mulch. Such farming practices were well known on the American Plains prior to 1900, and spread rapidly thereafter. The tablelands of the Dakotas and eastern Montana were settled at the same time as much of the Canadian Plains, between 1900 and 1920. Farmers who migrated into this area initially used the agricultural practices they brought with them. These farmers, however, quickly adopted the locally recommended systems of dry farming. According to one survey the transition began within a year of a township having 250 cultivated acres and in no case did it take longer than three years.  

It is important to note that the cropping practices which these American farmers had adopted were common on the Great Plains of the United States before the turn of the century. After that date they tended to be described as the "Dry-Farming System," and were attributed to Hardy Webster Campbell. Campbell had been born on a Vermont farm in 1850, and had held a variety of jobs in the American mid-west and west before homesteading in Brown County, Dakota Territory, in

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5. The myth of summerfallowing being invented at Indian Head, Saskatchewan is still with us. For the most recent expression of it, see, Sarah Carter, Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 170-171.
1879. Initially he prospered, but drought soon struck and Campbell later claimed to have lived through five successive crop failures. During this dry period he noticed that grass grew where horses had trod, or wagon wheels had run. He developed the idea of “packing” the sub-soil, but leaving the surface loose, as a way of conserving moisture and ensuring a crop. In 1895 he sought to promote his ideas through the Western Agricultural Improvement Society. That same year he launched his “Western Soil Culture” journal to promote his ideas, as well as advocate the British agricultural reformer Jethro Tull’s ideas regarding seeding in rows instead of the traditional broadcast method.

In January 1906 Campbell and a group of bankers and railroad men formed the Campbell System Farming Association of Denver, Colorado. The partners had a falling out, however, and Campbell left the group. The remaining members, renamed the Scientific Farming Association, allied themselves with the Denver Chamber of Commerce, and in January 1907 called a convention at which the Dry Farming Congress was formed.

Some agriculturalists on the Canadian Plains appear to have known about Campbell before his first Canadian lecture tour, because it was farmers who organized it. In 1907 settlers around Medicine Hat, Alberta, arranged for their local agricultural society, their provincial government, and the C.P.R. to sponsor a tour for Campbell in southern Alberta. Campbell accepted, and from 24 June to 6 July he delivered sixteen lectures in the area, three of which were field demonstration meetings.

Campbell was heralded as the "Father of the Dry-Farming System" in the newspaper accounts which preceded his tour. It was said that his message was an encouraging one, that was "...calculated to inspire confidence."

Campbell was also described as a "typical Yankee" who had tried New England farming methods on the plains but, unlike others, had learned from his mistakes and had stayed to apply the lessons he had learned. He was coming to Canada to describe what was actually being done in the semi-arid districts of the United States. "Canadians," it was said, "want knowledge and if he can tell them anything that will be of value they will listen eagerly."

In his talks in Canada the American agricultural reformer described the basic tenets of his system. Campbell was adamant that his system was not summerfallowing, and he referred to his method as summer tilling. There was an important difference according to Campbell, who told the assembled farmers that,

The usual idea of summer fallowing seems to be to let the weeds grow and then plow them under for green manure. Now we have become fully convinced that to do this is absolutely no good, for the water that the weeds take to grow is worth many more times the value of the material plowed under."

The farmers who invited Campbell to Canada were obviously intent on learning about his methods. The provincial government of Alberta was also interested in having its rural citizens exposed to dry farming ideas, but it had another motive as well. While immigration was largely a federal responsibility, the western Canadian provinces were engaged in promoting their respective provinces for settlement. By helping to sponsor Campbell’s visit, the Alberta provincial government was stating that his methods could be as successfully applied in Alberta as they were in the United States. This idea can be seen in the enthusiasm with which the province promoted Campbell’s visit. George Harcourt, Alberta’s Deputy Minister of Agriculture, accompanied Campbell on the tour.

In the advertisements announcing the schedule, Harcourt noted that,

Prof. Campbell is the famous Dry Farming expert of Nebraska and Colorado, whose system of cultivating land has revolutionized the semi-arid districts of the United States. Every farmer should make a special effort to hear him."

Officials of the C.P.R. already had some experience with Hardy Webster Campbell before they sponsored his 1907 visit to Canada. The company's American subsidiary, the Soo Line, was the second American railroad after the Northern Pacific to back Campbell in the United States. In the late 1890s the Soo Line, which runs from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Portal on the North Dakota/Saskatchewan border, engaged Campbell to operate a number of experimental farms along its line. Furthermore, in 1905 American federal government officials became interested in Campbell’s ideas and proposed that

10. Ibid., 94-96.
11. Ingles *op. cit.*, 15-16; *Farm and Ranch Review* (Calgary, Alberta) July 1907. Ingles claims that there were only a dozen meetings, but there were at least four more.
12. Lethbridge Herald, 20 June 1907.
14. Ibid.
the C.P.R. purchase and distribute copies of a Campbell publication. The company arranged for the province of Saskatchewan to cooperate in the scheme. Campbell's pamphlet was adapted to Canadian conditions, and published as "Hints to the Grain Growers" by the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture.15

The publication of Campbell's pamphlet by his department was likely W.R. Motherwell's first exposure to the American's "system." He may have been reminded of it early in 1909 when a rancher from the Maple Creek area of Saskatchewan wrote to him asking that the provincial government sponsor a Saskatchewan tour for Campbell. Motherwell, who was already conducting a campaign of his own emphasizing summerfalling, rejected the suggestion and in his reply argued that there was little difference between the two approaches to plains agriculture.

Instead, however, of referring to the method of tillage recommended by Prof. Campbell as 'dry farming'; we have spoken of it by the good old-fashioned term of summerfalling, a system which has been in vogue in the older districts in this province for the last twenty-five years. Summerfalling ... is exactly Mr. Campbell's dry-farming system and has no secret in connection with it whatsoever.

It is just simply good farming with an intelligent understanding of why the operation of tillage is so conducted and what results may be expected therefrom. The conservation of soil moisture is the most important principle in connection with our farming operations, and is the whole secret of summer-fallowing, or dry-farming as you wish to express it.16

Motherwell believed that summerfalling was synonymous with dry farming. Given his commitment to the tillage technique it is not surprising that he was attracted to the Dry Farming Congress, the organization founded by Hardy Webster Campbell, and a group of Denver, Colorado businessmen. Motherwell recognized the benefits to be gained by joining with the Americans. Saskatchewan would come to the attention of knowledgeable American dry land farmers, and his educational efforts would be expanded by tapping the propaganda of the movement.

Instead of using the Dry Farming movement, Motherwell was captured by it. He gradually became a convert to the American systematic point of view, and emerged as one of its leading proponents. Furthermore, he seized upon what was the most American element of the movement, its promotional factor, and made it his own. Even his vocabulary changed; eventually Motherwell spoke less and less of summerfallowing, and more about dry farming. The semantic evolution was indicative of his downgrading of the tillage technique to one portion of a larger entity, the American Dry Farming system.

Motherwell spoke at the Dry Farming Congress in Billings, Montana, in October 1909. His address was "What Good Soil Culture Has Done for Saskatchewan." At the gathering Motherwell was unanimously elected as the organization's vice-president for Saskatchewan. In a letter accepting the honor Motherwell indicated his favorable impression of the group:

I have been honored by being elected Vice-President for the Province of Saskatchewan of the Dry Farming Congress. Replying I may say that I consider it a privilege to act in this capacity, as I was very much impressed by the great educational work that this Congress has undertaken. The scope of its usefulness is almost unlimited.17

Motherwell was soon called upon to support his belief in the educational value of the Congress. While there are no estimates of how much literature the Congress mailed to Canada, it must have been substantial because early in 1910 the Saskatchewan politician was contacted to help solve a serious postal problem. John T. Burns, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Congress, wrote to Motherwell to inform him that its newsletter was no longer able to get a second class mailing privilege in Canada. Burns asked for the Saskatchewan Minister's help with the issue. Motherwell expressed his belief that the bulletin was purely educational, and indicated that he would look into the matter. Some months later he again wrote to Burns to let him know that he had been in touch with his federal Liberal colleagues at the Canadian Post Office.18

In his letter to the federal Postmaster-General, Motherwell revealed his growing enthusiasm for the Congress and its work:

At the out-set let me assure you that in my 10 November 1909,

estimation this Dry Farming Congress is one of the best educational movements of the day, in respect to better and more scientific methods of farming as applied to semi-arid districts or districts with less than 20 inches annual precipitation ... The organization, and the bulletin, are strictly educational, with no element of profit whatever accruing to anyone. It is, however, of immense educational value on dry farming methods as applied to western Canada and elsewhere.

Motherwell then asked for a special ruling on the Congress' postage. Unfortunately for the Congress, Motherwell's Liberal party ties did not help in this case; his request was denied.19

In his letter asking for Motherwell's help, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Congress mentioned that he had also contacted George Harcourt, Alberta's Deputy Minister of Agriculture, and the man who had enthusiastically supported Hardy Webster Campbell's visit to that province. Harcourt was also Alberta's Vice-President for the Congress. As such, he was Motherwell's major contact in Alberta, and the two kept in touch regarding dry farming developments. In the summer of 1910, Harcourt wrote to Motherwell noting the drought which had struck both provinces that year, and suggested that, "[t]he dry season this year should greatly increase the membership from Western Canada in the Dry Farming Congress. Alberta hopes to have a very much largely increased delegation present this fall." In his reply Motherwell agreed that it was going to be, "...a propitious year to preach dry farming...." 20

Like Motherwell, Harcourt had come west from Ontario. He was an official with the Territorial Department of Agriculture in Regina, and probably came to know Motherwell at that time. When Saskatchewan and Alberta were formed in 1905 he had moved to Edmonton to become Alberta's first Deputy Minister of Agriculture. He served in that capacity until 1915 when he resigned to take a position with the new Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Alberta. Nor was he the only Alberta contact in Motherwell's network. Harcourt's superior, Duncan Marshall, the Alberta Minister of Agriculture, invited Motherwell to travel with him to Colorado Springs for the 1911 Congress, and through his publicist indicated that he would, "...deem it a personal favour...." 21

Understandably Motherwell's network was stronger in Saskatchewan, although as in Alberta it extended beyond government into the provincial university's College of Agriculture. Motherwell's predecessor as the Congress' representative in Saskatchewan was W.J. Rutherford, at one time an official in Motherwell's Department of Agriculture. Rutherford had taught at the Manitoba Agricultural College for several years before joining Motherwell's staff as Deputy Minister in 1908. Two years later, along with several other members of the Department, he moved north to Saskatoon to become the first Dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan. 22

Two others who moved to Saskatoon were F. Hedley Auld and John Bracken. Auld had been Motherwell's chief statistician, and in Saskatoon became the College of Agriculture's Director of Extension. He later returned to the Department of Agriculture in Regina, and served as its Deputy Minister from 1916 until 1946. John Bracken was Motherwell's Superintendent of Fairs and Exhibitions until he left for Saskatoon to become the first Professor of Field Husbandry at the University. He would later become the Premier of Saskatchewan.
Manitoba, and eventually as head of Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, would serve as the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament. While Motherwell's network of contacts was extensive, it was never as strong in Manitoba as elsewhere. The major reason was the province's reluctance to be associated with the "dry" of dry farming. Manitobans did not consider themselves to be part of the dry farming belt because the province received a higher average annual rainfall than either Saskatchewan or Alberta. This attitude appears to only have begun to change following Manitoba's successful exhibition at the Dry Farming Congress in Lethbridge, Alberta, in 1912.

The Lethbridge Congress was the first one held outside of the United States, and was the apex of the dry farming movement in Canada. Even though the event was to take place in a neighboring province, W.R. Motherwell was determined to have it succeed, perhaps recognizing that the benefits radiating from the event would overflow into Saskatchewan. He likely did not need a Lethbridge newspaper publisher to remind him that many American farmers would be using the Congress as a chance to see the Canadian Plains, and that it was thus an opportunity to capitalize on their being in the country to get them to come back as settlers. Motherwell was certainly keen that Saskatchewan do well, noting in a letter to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Congress that, "[t]his province is desirous of making a particularly good showing at Lethbridge next year and we cannot begin a campaign looking toward that end too soon." As the chief spokesman for the Dry Farming Congress in Canada Motherwell was expected to obtain government support for the Lethbridge gathering. There was no difficulty in Saskatchewan, and Motherwell was able to arrange for a $5,000 provincial contribution. There was a problem at the federal level, however, since Motherwell, a Liberal, had to approach the then newly elected Conservative federal government. Motherwell did not shirk the task, and personally spoke with several Tory cabinet ministers. Early in 1912 he wrote to the federal Minister of Agriculture, Martin Burrell, asking that the cabinet approve an order-in-council inviting all countries to the Congress. Motherwell added, In making this petition, we of the West ask

that the Honourable (Privy) Council shall establish its own precedent as to the form of endorsement as there has never been held in Canada a similar convention or none so distinguished and valuable.

A month later Motherwell was again writing to Burrell stating that, ... I shall be pleased if you as a member of the Federal government will use your best endeavour to give such official recognition to this Dry Farming Congress as the importance of the occasion would seem to warrant.

In his reply of 8 April 1912 Burrell indicated that the official invitations had been issued through the Canadian Department of External Affairs, and included the comment that "... the Government of Canada takes a sympathetic interest in the Congress." Burrell also indicated that Motherwell's lobbying had been successful, since the federal government would be making a $10,000 donation to the Congress.

Local organizers needed the financial help because they were expecting 3,000 official delegates and many times that number of visitors. To ensure a large turnout the Congress was promoted as an "after harvest" holiday for farmers. In addition, Duncan Marshall, the Alberta Minister of Agriculture, and one of Motherwell's contacts in that province, issued 10,000 invitations to Alberta farmers. In the invitations Marshall called the Congress, "... the most important agricultural gathering held on the North American continent this year ...," and suggested that, "the application of the principles the Congress stands for will benefit every acre of land in the province." In order to accommodate the large number of expected visitors the local organizers went to extraordinary lengths. Anticipating accommodation problems, they erected a tent city near the displays so that farmers from the surrounding area would not be deterred from coming because of the congestion. They also received 900 cots from Calgary. The arrangements were necessary because in just four days the Congress attracted over 20,000 visitors.

Motherwell led a delegation of 107 to Lethbridge, second only to Alberta's understandably larger group. Saskatchewan won a prize for this turnout, but Motherwell must have been
particularly pleased that the province's exhibit won a blue ribbon for the best provincial or state display, beating Oklahoma for the honor. Saskatchewan's entry featured a replica of Niagara Falls—made of wheat! A mechanism was constructed which kept a stream of wheat pouring over the tiny Niagara all day. 30

The display competition should not be dismissed as so much "boosterism," although that element was present; the displays were also designed to be educational, demonstrating what dry farming had accomplished in a particular area. There was an even more practical element in that the winner of the competition was given consideration as the site for the next gathering. Since Alberta was ineligible by virtue of being the current host, Saskatchewan's victory made it the leading contender for the next Congress. No wonder one distraught Oklahoma delegate was overhead to say that, ...

... these Canucks sure have some mighty fine exhibits. I never saw anything nicer than that Alberta exhibit. I guess they must have spent some money to get that up. But then, the province votes the money and they can afford it. 31

The importance of the exhibit portion of the Congress can be gauged from the fact that there were 565 displays at Lethbridge. According to one source it had cost nearly $200,000 to gather them together in the city. While Alberta and Saskatchewan had the largest entries from the Canadian Plains region, Manitoba was also present with a 2,000 square foot display. There were also sixteen separate district displays from Alberta. Even the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) had a display at Lethbridge, perhaps in an attempt to woo back some of its former citizens who had migrated northward. It was the first time the U.S.D.A. had exhibited at a Dry Farming Congress, and the display featured sections on forestry, grains, grasses, and sorghum. 32

Governments were not the only conspicuous exhibitors. The C.P.R. erected a "permanent portable" display which illustrated all of the natural resources of western Canada; the C.P.R. had been a supporter of the dry farming movement dating back to its sponsorship of Hardy Webster Campbell's speaking tour in Canada. At some point it shifted its backing to the Dry Farming Congress. For the fifth gathering in Spokane in 1910 the Canadian corporation had purchased 1,000 memberships, which was as many as the Santa Fe had bought and twice the number obtained by the Colorado and Southern Railway. It was also known that William Whyte, a senior C.P.R. official, had given the Spokane Congress, "...considerable personal attention...." 33

Since Lethbridge was within its "territory," it is not surprising that the C.P.R. increased its support for that particular gathering. It again purchased 1,000 memberships in the organization. It also donated $5,000 to help defray costs and, when the Lethbridge organizers declared a deficit, the company added an additional $1,000 contribution. Such largess was not without its drawbacks though, and American companies apparently became upset with what they perceived to be the C.P.R.'s competition within the Congress. Such views were undoubtedly a factor in the decision not to hold the gathering for two consecutive years in Canada. 34

Motherwell was likely disappointed with the decision because he had hoped to hold the next Congress in Regina. He does appear, however, to have handled it well. In a letter to a Congress official on 7 November 1912, shortly after the completion of the Congress in Lethbridge, he wrote:

30 Ibid., 7 September 1912, 12 September 1912, 14 October 1912, 21 October 1912.
31 Ibid., 18 October 1912.
32 Ibid., 30 September 1912, 11 October 1912, 21 October 1912, 23 October 1912.
33 Ibid., 11 September 1912; SAB, Motherwell Papers, "Dry Farming Congress, 1909-1917" file, John T. Burns to Officers and Executive Committee, 5 August 1910, and John T. Burns to Dr. James Robertson, 5 August 1910.
34 Hedges, Building the Canadian West..., 342.
of the Lethbridge event, he noted that,

I fear also that if Regina were to get the Congress for next year it would have a tendency to wean a great many American exhibitors and prospective delegates from their interest in the Congress and its work. Rather than take chances on coming to Canada a second year in succession and running the risk of the major prizes being carried off by Canadians I fear many of the American States would withdraw from the competition altogether, and without a very large representation from the United States the Congress would lose much of its International feature. (Emphasis in original) 35

Motherwell's disappointment was mollified by a personal triumph at the Lethbridge Congress. He was elected president of the organization, the first non-American so honored. His selection underscored Motherwell's leadership of the dry farming movement in Canada. In accepting the presidency, Motherwell was also indicating his complete conversion to the American movement. His was a conscious decision based upon two beliefs: the educational value of the organization, and the potential immigration benefits to Saskatchewan. In a letter to a North Dakota admirer who had written to congratulate him, Motherwell revealed his thinking:

When this was first hinted to me I was very much tempted to decline the honour because of the extra amount of work it would involve, but on second consideration I felt it was such a tribute to our province and its rapidly increasing importance among the provinces of Canada and the States of the American Union, that I felt it was my duty to accept. I feel very much impressed with the good work that this Congress has already done, and like you, I feel that its opportunity for usefulness in the future exceeds even that of the past. 36

Motherwell's term as president of the Dry Farming Congress was not a particularly successful one. The 1913 Congress was awarded to Oklahoma, and Oklahoma City was originally considered as the site. For reasons which remain unclear, this did not develop. Muskogee was then examined as an alternative. This plan also fell through, and eventually Tulsa was settled upon. Problems continued to plague the 1913 Congress, and eventually Motherwell had to travel to Oklahoma to straighten out the situation. On 20 June 1913, Motherwell wrote to his Alberta contact, George Harcourt, explaining what he had done in Tulsa. Motherwell said that he had been forced to fire the local organizer, and had pressed the Tulsa Commercial Club into signing an agreement. In addition, Motherwell told Harcourt that he had had to let the group "off easy" on finances. The Oklahoma problem also resulted in Motherwell telling people in Regina to wait before committing themselves to the 1914 event because he did not want a "half dead" Congress. 37

The mayor and several prominent citizens of Regina travelled to the Tulsa Congress, and decided that it was not an event they wanted for their city. Once again Motherwell was disappointed, although his criticism of the Congress was directed at its organizational and financial difficulties, and not its educational and promotional work. In a letter to a Congress official in August 1914, Motherwell argued that the organization had become too "unwieldy," and that in Saskatchewan he now preferred utilizing his own department and the College of Agriculture's extension service. He concluded by saying that, while he had been profoundly impressed by the work of the organization, its very success had led to such "abnormal growth" that the Congress was now impossible to finance. 38

While his faith had been tested there is no doubt that Motherwell clung to his by now spiritual belief in dry farming. Indeed, just a year after the Oklahoma failure Motherwell was voicing his faith in religious terms. In a letter to the editor of The Saskatchewan Farmer Motherwell stated,

The Gospel of Salvation is an old story and yet we have to keep hammering away at the unbelieving. In the same way, the gospel of dry farming, while getting to be an old story is comparatively new to hundreds of thousands and so long as there are unbelievers, the work must go on. 39

Motherwell's faith was tested again at the 1915 Congress in Denver, Colorado. At that gathering officials of the United States Department of Agriculture launched an attack on Hardy Webster Campbell and the whole idea of dry farming.

36. Ibid., W.R. Motherwell to W.C. Palmer, 8 November 1912.
37. Ibid., W.R. Motherwell to John T. Burns, undated; W.R. Motherwell to John T. Burns, 7 November 1912; W.R. Motherwell to John T. Burns, 19 April 1913; W.R. Motherwell to A.A. Brewer, 30 April 1913; "An Agreement Between the International Dry Farming Congress and Tulsa Commercial Club," 10 June 1913; W.R. Motherwell to George Harcourt, 20 June 1913.
38. Ibid., A.F. Manle to R.H. Faxon, 2 July 1914; W.R. Motherwell to R. H. Faxon, 26 August 1914.
arguing that it had no scientific basis. These charges, and the ensuing debate, brought to a head the divisions between the systematic reformers and the agricultural scientists within the Congress. In the United States the Congress had always had a strong component, and their exaggerated claims aroused agricultural scientists in Washington and elsewhere to investigate, and eventually to refute their supposed scientific basis.  

Motherwell stoutly defended dry farming in Denver. As the arguments raged, Motherwell asked, "[w]here is our dry-farming?" He indicated that while he did not know the scientific explanation of how plants got water, he did know that they obtained it. Noting that his own experience as a farmer went back to the early 1880s, the Saskatchewan politician said that he also believed that farmers could store enough water in the soil to be "practically independent" of clouds each year. He concluded by arguing that, "... there are a good many of us today who cling to our faith in dry-farming and some-one is apparently trying to shake it. " Motherwell, for one, would not be moved. 

The Dry Farming Congress could not withstand the attacks of the scientific agricul -turalists. The Denver gathering was the last one under that name, and thereafter the movement moved toward a more general notion of agricultural reform under the name of the International Farming Congress. It later merged with the International Irrigation Congress under the same name. The new thrust of the organization was reflected in its choice of location for its 1917 gathering. In that year it met in Peoria, Illinois—well outside of the dry farming region.  

W.R. Motherwell continued as Saskatchewan's Minister of Agriculture until 1918, but he does not seem to have played a role in the further evolution of the Dry Farming Congress. The Denver meeting was clearly a turning point for the farmer-politician, and, while he did not lose his faith in dry farming, he does seem to have recognized that the future of agriculture on the Canadian Plains, as in the United States, increasingly belonged to the agricultural scientists and their university colleagues. The University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, with its allied institutions in Alberta and Manitoba, would henceforth carry forward agricultural reform on the Canadian Plains. They too were deeply affected by American developments, and modeled themselves after American institutions. The colleges of agriculture at Canadian plains universities insured that the American presence in agricultural reform would continue long after Hardy Webster Campbell and W.R. Motherwell had left the scene.  

41. Ibid., 117. 
42. Roe, op. cit., 288.