

Dakota Images

In his long career as a farmer, lawmaker, and organizer, Emil Loriks gained recognition as a tireless champion of farm issues.

Carl Emil Loriks was born on 18 July 1895 near Oldham, South Dakota, to Swedish immigrant parents. English was his second language, but by the time he attended Eastern State Normal School in Madison, he was a persuasive debater. After obtaining a teaching certificate, he completed a B.S. in agriculture at the University of Nebraska. Loriks enlisted for service in World War I, earning a spot as a trainee pilot for the army's fledgling air arm.

Returning to his family's farm, Loriks married Ruth Dahlen in 1924; six years later they had a daughter. Meanwhile, Loriks embraced politics as a way to advance education and farm issues. Elected to the state senate in 1926, he chaired the joint appropriations committee after the Democratic sweep of 1932. In 1934, he resigned his seat to work as president of the state Farmers Union but remained active in legislative matters. Among his accomplishments as a legislator was the enactment of a gold severance tax on the Homestake mine. Loriks lost his bid for a United States Senate seat in 1938 but went on to become a state and regional administrator for the New Deal's Farm Security Administration.

Loriks is best known as a builder of farm organizations. From 1932 to 1934, he helped to lead the South Dakota Farm Holiday, a controversial movement that occasionally used acts of resistance in an attempt to raise farm prices and slow foreclosures. Loriks moderated his stance as he moved to the Farmers Union, becoming its national secretary in 1942. In the late 1930s, he aided in the creation of the Grain Terminal Association, a cooperative designed to give farmers greater control in the marketing of their commodities. By 1957, he was its president, a position he held until his retirement ten years later.

Loriks remained active as an opinion leader for the agricultural community. He died on Christmas Day in 1985 at the age of ninety, less than a year after attending his last big farm rally, where Governor William J. Janklow characterized him as "the heart of rural America."

—Rodger Hartley

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