

HISTORIC NAME: Farmer Seed and Nursery Company		COUNTY: Rice
CURRENT NAME: Farmer Seed Company		CITY/TWP.: Faribault
LEGAL DESC.: The south half of Block 9, McClelland's Addition to Faribault, excluding the railroad right-of-way at the west end.		ADDRESS: 818 NW 4th Street
CLASSIFICATION:	CONDITION:	SIGNIFICANCE:
Building <u>X</u>	Excellent _____	Local <u>X</u>
Structure _____	Good _____	State _____
Object _____	Fair <u>X</u>	National _____
District _____	Deteriorated _____	
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: Yes ___ No ___ Restricted <u>X</u>	PRESENT USE: Commercial	
VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD: Yes <u>X</u> No ___		
OCCUPIED: Yes <u>X</u> No ___		
DATE CONSTRUCTED: c.1890-1909	ORIGINAL USE: Commercial	
ORIGINAL OWNER: Farmer Seed and Nursery	ARCHITECT/BUILDER: <u>unknown</u>	
OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Farmer Seed Company 818 NW 4th Street Faribault, MN 55021	ACREAGE: Less than one acre approx. <u>2 acres</u>	
LOCAL CONTACT/ORG.: Rice County Historical Society, P.O. Box 5, Faribault, MN 55021	UTM REFERENCE: Faribault Quad. 7.5 15 / 477550 / 4904440	
FORM PREPARED BY: Britta Bloomberg		
DATE: April 1981		

DESCRIPTION:

The Farmer Seed and Nursery Company is a highly visible warehouse on the north side of NW Fourth Street (Highway 60), about eight blocks west of downtown Faribault. (The massive structure is a local landmark amidst the commercial strip development along Highway 60.)

The large warehouse was constructed in phases between the early 1890s and 1920s. The building is of stone and wood frame construction and is a sprawling, multi-leveled structure ranging from three to five stories in height. The main section measures 65 by 155 and is three stories with a one story base of rock-faced Faribault stone. The stone portion dates to the early 1890s and was occupied by the Faribault Thresher Company before it was purchased by Farmer Seed in 1899. Windows in this section are slightly arched and double hung, excepting a large rectilinear store window on the west side of the front (south) facade. A series of additions were constructed after 1900: a two story elevator in 1902, an east wing in 1906, second and third stories over the main section in 1907 and 1909, and the fourth and fifth stories in the 1920s. These addition are of frame construction sheathed with light green aluminum siding. Bands of dark green siding are located between the first three floors. The firm's name appears in bold white letters between the second and third floors, lending variety to the surface and regular fenestration. The siding apparently dates to the 1920s. Windows are rectilinear throughout. A two story concrete section (1950s) is located at the rear, and a recent metal shed for the nursery and plant department is located at the southeast corner.

Today Farmer Seed occupies the basement and first two floors. The main floor consists of offices and retail space; the second floor is offices and storage. The basement is also utilized for storage and as part of the nursery department. The upper floors are vacant, although the shell remains totally intact, including elevator shafts, grain and seed storage bins, and some machinery. The furnishings and much of the machinery have been removed.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Farmer Seed and Nursery Company is significant as the most visible surviving structure linked to Faribault's role as a major agricultural processing and distribution center for south central Minnesota from the 1890s through the 20th century. Farmer Seed was established in Chicago in 1888 by Otto Kozlowski and William Kueker, associate editors of a monthly farm paper. Impressed by the numerous requests from readers, they decided to launch a mail order seed business which distributed over 20,000 seed catalogs within a few years.

Significance - continued

During the 1893 Chicago Exposition, they selected Faribault as the future location of the business. The city was considered one of the true "garden spots" of the Northwest and an important trade and distribution center in one of Minnesota's richest agricultural regions.¹ In 1894 the company moved to Faribault and purchased forty acres outside of town to begin growing seeds themselves (before they had contracted to other growers). A store was erected on the south side of Fourth Street NW (south of the present structure). By 1899 they purchased the larger warehouse across the street and proceeded to enlarge the building in phases to accommodate a rapidly expanding operation. The business continued to prosper, and additional seed farms were purchased in Rice and Blue Earth Counties; a nursery department was added in 1909 and the present name assumed. Farmer Seed and Nursery's national market peaked in the late 1930s. The firm remains in operation and maintains an active business in Faribault, although its home base is now LeCenter in neighboring LeSueur County. It continues to represent Rice County's agricultural base and the role that Faribault has traditionally played as an important distribution and processing center for the region.

¹ "Farmer Seed and Nursery Co.'s Half Century of Progress," National Seedsman, February, 1938, 12.

Bibliography:

- Curtiss-Wedge, Franklyn ed.; History of Rice and Steele Counties Minnesota, Chicago: 1910.
"Farmer Seed and Nursery Co.'s Half Century of Progress," National Seedsman, February, 1938.
Farmer Seed and Nursery Co. historical file, Rice County Historical Museum.
Sanborn Insurance Company maps, 1893, 1899, 1905, 1909, 1921, 1930.