

Agriculture and Federal Policy: The Need for New Directions

John C. White

Agricultural producers today are doing a better job of producing than ever before, but we are not doing a better job of selling. I am concerned about the force of direction our national leadership is taking in agriculture, and the interest that our leadership takes in agricultural affairs.

National Food Policy

The development of a national food policy is the most important issue facing our country. There is not a single issue more important. It is our food-producing capabilities that will keep us strong, keep us healthy, and keep us making significant contributions to the rest of the world.

It bothers me that we have gone through a long presidential nomination process without the leading contenders in both parties, Republican and Democratic, uttering a word in public about the necessity for the development of a food and agriculture policy. They debate highly emotional, superficial issues but so far have ignored the great issue of keeping this giant American food machine going.

We must concern ourselves with infusing agriculture with new blood and new vitality. We must develop new goals and new programs. We cannot afford this great critical issue which will determine how we are going to live as a nation in the next few years.

The job of United States Secretary of Agriculture is a far bigger job than the present officeholder sees it. The job of Secretary of Agriculture is emerging as the most important job in the Cabinet, and we will eventually see the day when it is recognized as such and the Secretary of State and other officials will be going to him for advice on what is in the best interests of this country.

Increase Research Funds

We must get to work on finding answers to the problems that face us if we are to maintain our agricultural strength. Instead of reductions in funds for research, we need an increase so we can develop new varieties and increase the output of our present varieties. We must develop new techniques and new ideas to meet the challenge of the future.

Instead of retreating as crisis approaches, we must face our responsibilities and get on to the business of developing our natural resources for food production.

This area around Lubbock is one of the most productive regions in American. But the limit of production is determined by available water supplies. Unless our na-

Remarks made by Texas Agriculture Commissioner John C. White during the opening session of the 1976 NACTA Conference held at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, June 16-18.

tional leadership does something about developing natural resources so that adequate water supplies are available and will remain available for our important agricultural areas, then we are doomed.

Our policy, encouraged by federal guidelines, has been to produce from fence row to fence row for the last several years and will probably continue in the future because the world needs our food supplies.

To go with this policy, we need some act that will provide assurance for our producers that they will not go bankrupt in case of mismanagement in world affairs or artificial interruptions in market procedures and exports by political power brokers.

I'm not talking about a program that makes a farmer dependent on the federal government. I don't know any producer that wants to become an employee of the federal government or a multinational corporation. But we do want a program that doesn't leave the producer at the mercy of the power broker, such as happened last fall when George Meany carried the big stick and used it to shut down our grain exports.

If we are going to encourage oversupply in this country, there ought to be a net somewhere down there at the bankruptcy level to protect the people that are following their government's encouragement and guidelines. We have an obligation to keep these people in business, a credit system or support system to protect them.

Consumer and Producer Interest

We need a free market and economic policies that will give our producers an opportunity to make a profit, but we must remember that a food policy that is good for producers also will have to be good for consumers. An agricultural policy that is not also good for the consumer will not pass in this country.

So an additional burden is placed on our leadership to develop a policy that is good for consumers and to educate consumers to the benefits of aiding our producers.

Farm credit, those of you in agriculture know, is the most difficult credit to obtain. Do you realize that the Federal Reserve Board, which determines the cash policies of this country and the money flow, has no one on the board and never has had anyone that has the slightest idea about farm credit and farm needs for money? And yet the agriculture industry and agribusiness are the largest credit users in the country.

It is time that we demand a representative on the board who knows something about farm credit if the success or failure of agriculture has so much to do with this nation's economic success.

Need For Young People

We need to put young people in agriculture. But it won't do any good to put young people in agriculture unless the economic climate is good enough for them to survive.

But you have to go back to Abraham Lincoln, over 100 years ago, to find a bold program to develop our nation's agricultural resources and bring new vitality to agriculture. The Homestead Act of a century ago gave anybody a homestead of 160 acres if he would live on it and develop it. If you talked about giving a farm to a youngster today, it would be called socialism.

We do have to develop a national program for our young people who want to be farmers and ranchers, however, and help them realize their dreams.

Doctors who practice in certain rural areas are given a percentage of the loan that they were educated with. Why can't we develop a program with incentives for farmers and ranchers who will maintain our agricultural productivity?

There is legislation pending in Congress presently that would allow the government to purchase farm land, rent it to young farmers for several years, and then sell it to them at a reduced rate. This is the beginning of the kinds of ideas we need to be talking about.

Agriculture can be a profit-making business, but we need to assure the producer of a start.

My father was a tenant farmer during the Depression. He didn't have any credit, and there was no way he

could go to a bank and get a loan. But, as a result of the Farmers Security Administration, he was able to get a loan. We moved to a resettlement project with a new house and barn and enough cash to make a crop and, within a few years, he was a taxpayer. He paid back every penny of the money loaned him by the government, with interest, and was a taxpayer for the rest of his life. So I'm not afraid of making an investment in the American people because I know the investment will be paid back many times over.

Golden Age?

I hear some people say that America is at the end of its Golden Age, that we are wasteful and have used up the world's food supplies and natural resources.

The truth of the matter is that the United States is not at the end of its Golden Age; we are just at the beginning. If this country has a real purpose for the soul of its life in this, our 200th year, it is to show other nations that our form of government will work and we can add to it through using our natural resources and technical know-how to confront any crisis.

And within this century, our world faces the possibility of a global food crisis. When that crisis arrives, the United States will be there, making a significant contribution to the welfare of all mankind. That is our destiny.

When we reach that destiny, the United States will reach its real Golden Age, and it will be the beginning of a great new era.



Conference Souvenirs — J. Wayland Bennett of Texas Tech University, 1976 NACTA Conference planner and coordinator; gives miniature cotton bales as memoirs of Texas Agriculture to Gerald W. Thomas, president of New Mexico State University; Edward C. Frederick, provost of University of Minnesota Technical College — Waseca; William R. Thomas, associate dean of Colorado State University; and Tony Razaitis, Interstate Printers and Publishers of Danville, IL.