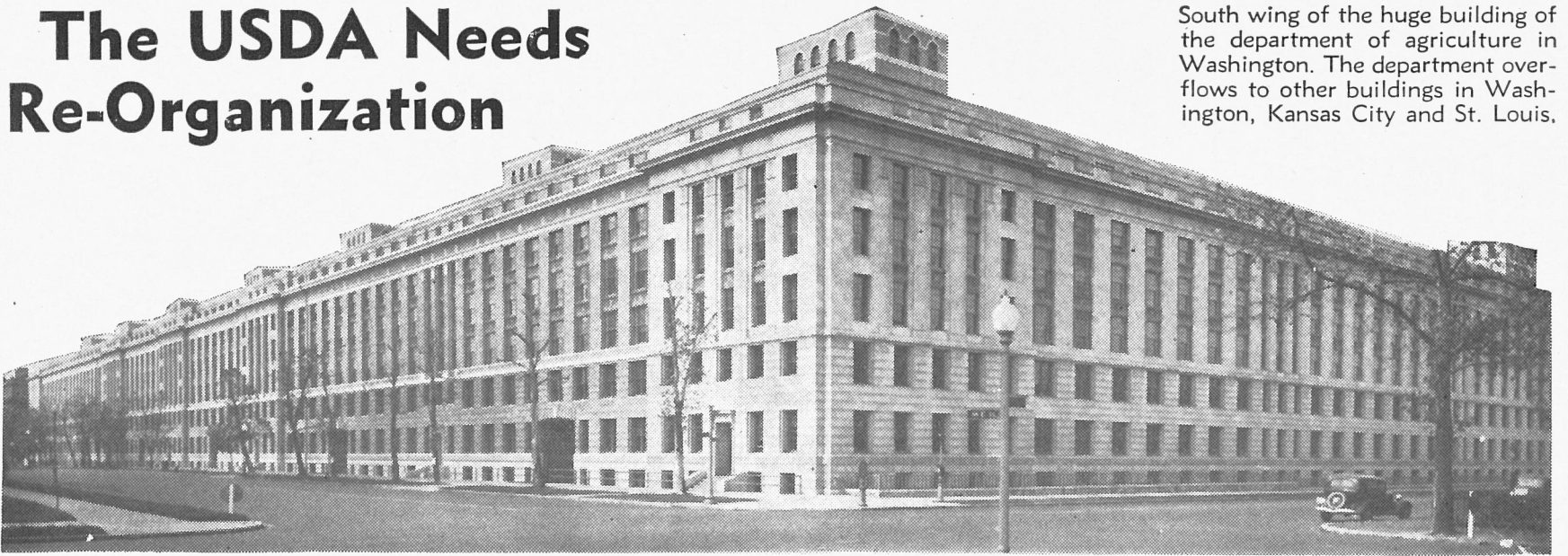


# The FARMER-STOCKMAN

Serving Agriculture in Oklahoma and Texas

August 1944

## The USDA Needs Re-Organization



South wing of the huge building of the department of agriculture in Washington. The department overflows to other buildings in Washington, Kansas City and St. Louis.

Ferdie Deering

**T**HE United States department of agriculture and the war food administration together constitute the largest non-military public agency in the world—and probably the most complicated.

Its activities extend into nearly every county in the United States, with 4 to 12 departmental offices at the county seats. The AAA has offices in more than 3,000 counties; the extension service in almost that many; the FSA in over 2,500; the FCA in about 2,000; the REA in more than 800, to cite a few examples.

Their activities and those of the 50 other agencies cover just about everything the farmer does. They range from easy credit on future crops to cash payments for applying fertilizer to his fields; from telling him how to grow a garden to telling him what price he can receive for his peanuts; from regulating the marketing of his produce through crop loans to solving his labor problem by sending him a farm hand or installing electricity to operate a milking machine.

Some of the larger bureaus employ upwards of 10,000 persons each; others only 200 or 300. The cost of operation totals around a billion dollars a year.

### History of USDA

The USDA was started during the 1830's when the patent office, then in the state department, set up a section to distribute seeds and collect agricultural statistics. Other functions were added and in 1862 President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill giving it full bureau status. In 1889 the department was raised to cabinet rank, with a secretary of agriculture.

Since then it has undergone numerous reorganizations, with new duties and bureaus added from time to time. Most of the present bureaus have been formed or rebuilt since 1933, and the department has undergone no less than six major reorganizations in the past 11 years, redistributing authority and duties.

A year after Pearl Harbor, authority with respect to the nation's wartime food program had been delegated to the secretary of agriculture. In the spring of 1943 executive orders set up the war food administration, transferring to the administrator "all powers, functions and duties conferred upon the secretary of agriculture by the earlier order, including those relating to labor and manpower."

The primary responsibility of the WFA was defined as that of assuring an adequate supply and efficient distribution of food to meet war and essential civilian needs. To achieve this, executive order No. 9334 of April 19, 1943, so defined the respective duties and functions of the secretary of agriculture and the war food administrator that "each has authority to exercise any and all powers vested in the other, by statute or otherwise," adding that such power is not subject to challenge by any third party who might be affected.

There are two ways of looking at the USDA-WFA. One is from the top down; the other is from the bottom up.

From the top down, it is a bureaucrat's dream. There is almost no end to the number and kinds of bureaus which can be set up, with sufficient overlapping to assure ample possibility of passing the buck, no matter what the responsibility at hand might be, and if one job plays out there always are plenty of other bureaus to offer better jobs, often at higher pay.

Bureaus may be and sometimes are set up on the spur of the moment and combined, transferred or dissolved almost before the employees find out what they are supposed to do.

### The Set-Up

It is impossible to diagram in a single chart the organization of the USDA-WFA, with the multiplicity of powers, duties, services and its thousands of employees. But here is a sort of running score on the set-up:

Four agencies,—the Agricultural Research administration, the Farm Credit administration, Rural Electrification administration and Forest service—are responsible to the secretary of agriculture.

The service and staff agencies for the WFA are identical with those for the USDA and are utilized by both in the same manner, according to official reports. These are the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Office of Budget and Finance, the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, the Office of Information, the Library, the offices of Personnel, Solicitor and Plant-and-Operations. The Land Use Co-ordinator is in the immediate office of the secretary since January 1, 1944.

In the WFA and responsible to the war food administrator are the Office of Labor, Office of Materials and Facilities, Office of Price (not OPA), the Office of Transportation, the Office of Distribution and the Office of Production.

### Office of Distribution

Under the Office of Distribution are combined the activities formerly carried on by the Agricultural Marketing administration (the AMS, CEA, and SMA), the Sugar agency of CCAA, functions of the Office of Agricultural War Relations concerned primarily with food distribution, regulatory work of the Bureau of Animal Industry (which is or was part of the ARA), the Food division of the War Production board, and the nutrition functions of the Office of Defense and the Health and Welfare service of the Office of Emergency Management.

There are nine commodity branches, in addition to a Requirements and Allocations Control, a Program Liaison, a Transportation and Warehousing branch, Civilian Foods Requirements branch, Nutrition Programs, Industry Operations and Compliance branches.

The Office of Production, the companion branch, includes two staff branches, the Conservation Programs branch and the Food and Livestock branch, besides the Federal Crop Insurance Corp., which is now being liquidated.

Other independent agencies in the WFA include the Soil Conservation service, the Agricultural Adjustment agency (AAA),

the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the Commodity Credit Corp. (CCC) and the Extension service (county agents).

Remember, too, that both the secretary of agriculture and war food administrator have complete authority over all the bureaus under either's direction.

In addition, there are over-all divisions such as the War Meat board, the National War board and the Combined Food board, along with certain provisions for collaboration (or co-operation) with various other bureaus and agencies, both within and without the USDA-WFA set-up.

Presumably all exist to "assure adequate supplies and efficient distribution of food."

From the bottom, the picture must be viewed from the eyes of the farmer who grows and markets the food. To many farmers, this tremendous and incredible organization looms as a Frankenstein monster ready to devour the very man it was built to help. There are indications that it is ready and willing to take over the complete direction and management of the nation's farms. (For evidence of this see "What Post-War policies for Agriculture?" issued a few months ago by the USDA Interbureau and Regional committees on post-war planning and summarized on page 1 of the March, 1944, Farmer-Stockman.)

### States Control Small

In Oklahoma and Texas, the functions of the state departments of agriculture are nearly all regulatory and do not figure largely in any of the fields mentioned. Local and state groups have almost no voice in formulating policies administered by the federal agencies. Even where state and county committees exist most of the policies are routed from Washington and state offices to the committeemen, rather than the other way.

The extension service is operated through land-grant colleges and county commissioners have a voice in the employment of county agents. To some extent the work of research agencies is carried on in land-grant colleges, but there are also independent federal research and experiment stations.

Nearly all of the bureaus or agencies in the USDA-WFA have direct lines from Washington to the farmer through regional, state, district or county offices, operated separately and independently of other USDA-WFA offices in the same areas.

### Mimeographed Policies

Policies usually are formed in Washington, routed downward via that wonderful invention, the mimeograph machine, and executed in "co-operation" with but without regard for what other agencies may be doing. Each is willing to work with the others but he does so within the limitations of his instructions, which exclude provisions for local situations where conflicts may exist. And, conflicts do exist, regardless of what higher bureau officials have to say about everything being sweetness and light.

Can the present structure be remodeled into an understandable, efficient organization to help the farmer produce and

market his crops in a way that he can understand?

It appears very unlikely. Louis Bromfield, farmer and author, declared recently at Oklahoma City:

"We can't go on patching it up any longer. The USDA is lacking in leadership and planning. We must get somebody in there who will turn things upside down and raise hell." Before turning things upside down, though, it is important to have some idea of what is going to be left when the shake-up settles.

### A Suggestion

Here is what a large segment of farmers and many of the field workers of the USDA-WFA would like to see:

First, a clean sweep of all of the existing bureaus and agencies, with their nomenclature, individuality and overlapping functions. Granted, that each bureau has some desirable functions and services to render for the good of agriculture.

Second, organize these desirable functions into a single department of agriculture, with a single head. This should be done by considering that the USDA has three main functions to perform: Research, Education and Administration.

Most of the agencies are now attempting to perform all three of these functions, with useless duplication and inefficiency resulting.

Third, route the functions of all three branches of the department of agriculture through the state departments of agriculture and land-grant colleges, so that some degree of state and local control may be retained in accordance with the democratic principle of government.

Fourth, organize the county units so that all functions of the federal and state departments of agriculture will operate as a unit, or team.

Branches for information, for credit, for soil conservation and probably other services in a county should be headed by one administrator so that workers will have time to serve the farmer instead of spending most of their time administering. Have all offices located so that farmers will not have to visit five or six places to transact business with the government farm agencies.

### Who Would Approve

Such a reorganization would meet with popular approval of both farmers and many field workers of the agricultural divisions.

Most of these latter employees are sincere and hard-working individuals, trying honestly to render some service to agriculture. Certainly that is true of volunteer farmer members of soil conservation district boards, AAA committees and similar boards. They recognize the untold possibilities of greater service to agriculture at lower cost.

These suggestions are in accordance with expressions heard from many quarters, including congress, where a bill is now pending that would require consolidation of local offices of federal agencies.

Several of the bureaus in the USDA-WFA were created by executive order or

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# USDA-WFA

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secretary's memorandum; others have been granted powers in this manner. It was this and other developments that prompted Albert S. Gooss, master of the National Grange, to assert:

"Any executive encroachment on the rights of the people or the powers of congress leads to breaking down the balance of power, to building up centralized control, and is a step toward dictatorship. The trend in that direction is too strong to be ignored.

"Abuses are occurring which seriously impair our rights and affect our daily lives. Some of these abuses result from direct law violations, while others arise from indirection.

"Congress should take whatever steps are necessary to put a stop to them as soon as they appear, for they are rapidly building up a bureaucracy which is taking unto itself the power to make its own laws. The spread of this is becoming so common as to give real cause for alarm. Instead of a government by law, we are rapidly becoming a government by regulation and executive order."

This statement was unanimously endorsed by the annual convention of the National Grange at Grand Rapids, Mich., last November.

## Pause of Confusion

In a statement before the house appropriations agricultural subcommittee on March 4, 1944, President Edward A. O'Neal of the American Farm Bureau Federation recommended several changes for the 1945 program and reaffirmed a proposal for the reorganization of the administration of the farm program adopted at the convention of the AFBF in Baltimore in December, 1941, in part as follows:

"The new programs which have been provided in the agricultural legislation enacted during recent years in the normal process of growth have resulted in too much overlapping and duplication of activity. The many agencies needed to carry on this program have been the natural result of the process of considering each subject separately.

"A woeful lack of co-ordination and planning in carrying out these programs is evident to every farmer. On too many occasions one agency recommends an activity in conflict with that of another agency. Too many instances prevail where personnel is employed to accomplish an activity already embraced within the functions of another and existing agency.

"Farmers do not want numerous agencies consulting them on farm programs. They want co-ordination of these efforts, consistency in administration, without duplication and overlapping and, above all, administration with the least expenditure of government funds."

## Other Evidence

The evidence that could be documented from local, county and state agricultural groups in support of a better organized and less confusing department of agriculture is enormous. The examples cited have been from the larger organized groups. Here are two others more directly from the farmers.

On March 28, 1944, nearly 1,000 Oklahoma business men, farmers and agricultural leaders gathered for the first Oklahoma statewide Save-the-Soil clinic, adopted nine brief resolutions. One of them said:

"We urge consolidation of all federal and state bureaus and/or agencies having to do with soil conservation, to promote economy and efficiency."

Going further, County Agent R. G. Jeffrey sent out 82 questionnaires to farmers and business men in Wagoner county, Okla. Out of 58 replies received, 50 favored the consolidation of all agricultural agencies in the county under one head; six favored keeping separate agencies.

The folks out on the farms and the field workers in agriculture, representatives of the farmer organizations, business and college groups dealing with farmers, agree that something must be done to simplify, unify and co-ordinate the USDA-WFA.

Frequently, out over the country (but not in Washington) is heard the comment that farmers have achieved the enormous food production record of the past three years in spite of the department of agriculture, rather than because of it.

When such a feeling prevails, it is high time that congress and the administration wake up to the fact. Unless something is done, and at once, the post-war period is likely to find the farmers in a position far worse than they were in following World war I. Then that dreaded monster of government, complete regimentation, may become a reality.