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## "The Farm Problem Is Here Again"

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*Conspicuous achievement awards*

Somebody said that the reason history repeats itself is that we don't pay attention the first time. Regarding farm problems, you can say that again, and again, and again!

When the program committee invited me to speak here today, they tactfully suggested that it was because I am one of the ~~declining number of~~ old timers who were here when the Oklahoma Farm Bureau was organized 25 years ago and who are still tottering around. They had to have some excuse! So they suggested that I take a look through our magazines of that time to compare farm problems and solutions with those of today. *I did, and I found history repeating itself like a stuck phonograph needle.*

The Farmer-Stockman cover for January 1, 1941 showed a happy-looking baby popping out of a suitcase tagged....."Happy New Year!" That was the year that the Oklahoma Farm Bureau organization movement got under way, which was a happy event, but many things happened that year which weren't so pleasant.

The United States was not yet in World War II but we were helping our friends to fight the Axis, and our lead story, addressed to farm boys about to be drafted, was headlined: "You're In The Army Now!" Claude Wickard was Secretary of Agriculture, with Henry A. Wallace moving into the Vice Presidency under Franklin D. Roosevelt who had just been elected to an unprecedented third term.

That same issue revealed that Oklahoma Farm people were still raising chickens, gardens and flowers, The Lazy Farmer was singing about how to get out of work and as usual we had a layout of pictures of Oklahoma 4-H and FFA winners. We were promoting grass on eroded hills because it would pay more dollars per acre than any other crop, and we were encouraging cattle feeding. Reports showed Oklahoma had 25,000 head on feed then compared to 118,000 at the <sup>latest</sup> ~~last~~ 1966 report.

Our Washington reporter wrote that "Farmers are encouraged by the government's experts to look forward to the new year with hope and courage," but William S. Knudsen warned that the first 6 months would be crucial for national defense, and it was forecast~~ed~~ that the Battle of Britain would be decided in that period.

In later issues that year, one writer noted that "The war keeps throwing the world's agriculture farther out of joint, creating a crazy quilt of surpluses and shortages".

Another headline asked: "What are we going to do with all of this cotton?" It was reported that the American Farm Bureau Federation and The National Farmers Union were at loggerheads in Washington where there was talk about a 2-quota system for farmers, a domestic quota and a surplus quota on major crops.

A cartoon worried about the high \$65 billion national debt limit then in effect. Now we wish we could get it down to that! War time inflation had

set in and farmers were hit by shortages of tires, machinery and repairs. Their sons were being drafted and hired men were going to work in war plants.

Thumbing on through the files we find farm price fixing was a major issue. Cotton loan rate was 14.82¢ lb., wheat was 99¢ bu., corn 70¢, beef cattle \$8.70 cwt., hogs \$10.90 cwt., milk \$2.05 cwt., grain sorghum \$1.10 cwt., cottonseed \$45.00 ton and alfalfa \$8.00 ton. Oklahoma had 20 cheese plants in operation.

~~In August 1942,~~ we published a study of average values of family size farms. In central Oklahoma the average was \$7,333. In the mountains of Southeastern Oklahoma the low average was \$3,337. In the panhandle the average was \$10,920. Compare those figures with the latest statewide census average of \$51,000 per farm.

Well, that's the way things looked before the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. In November 1941, just before Pearl Harbor, editor Clarence Roberts wrote in a full page editorial that the Farm Bureau at last is being organized in Oklahoma. The appeal was directed to 150,000 farmers in the state who did not belong to any farm organization. First official meeting was held November 5, 1941 in Ponca City. It was there that the organizing committee was named to seek a charter membership of 500. In his editorial, Roberts asked:

"Why another organization in Oklahoma? Are not 2 enough? Two are not enough when less than 1 farmer in 5 belongs to either. Why the Farm Bureau? Because the Farm Bureau is the most aggressive and ably led farm organization in the United States. Its membership is made up of business farmers. The Bureau's program is an economic program. That program

is concerned with prices, savings, dividends---everything that makes up or deals in the economic well-being of farmers on the farm".

Then he added:

"After the war will come an impelling need for organized effort on the part of all farmers to prevent what happened in 1932. The mop-up must not be left to chance. The farmer must not again be called on to take the rap."

Then came Pearl Harbor, and we were in the war for sure, but the Farm Bureau organization movement pushed ahead. By January 1942 the cover of The Farmer-Stockman featured bombers on the wing, and articles discussed the shortages of war and demands that farmers produce more food with less help and old equipment.

The February 1942 issue reported that the Oklahoma Farm Bureau had been organized, and included pictures of some youngish-looking directors among them Lewis Munn, the only one still in office. The board was directed to work in co-ordination insofar as possible with all farm organizations that formulate and sponsor policies for the betterment of the agriculture industry.

The convention <sup>was</sup> attended by more than ~~1,000~~ <sup>1,000</sup> Oklahoma farmers, *(probably only time entire membership ever in one room)*  
*It* went on record in favor of legislation by Congress that would enable farmers to realize their fair share of the national income through the principle of current parity prices. "Asking no favors, we insist on being placed on the same footing as all other protected industries," the resolution stated.

At the meeting, AFBF president Edward A. O'Neal said: "We will produce all that is needed to feed the democracies of the world, but in doing it we want to be sure the farmers of the United States will not be gyped". The farm people must have a voice in writing the peace after the war, and the only way we can obtain that voice is through organization".

So the Oklahoma Farm Bureau came into existence. It moved into a donated office space with borrowed furniture, but without debt or obligation to anyone, except to serve the best interest of the farm people of the state and nation.

*Pause here to pay tribute to high caliber leadership has had & has now: John T. Taylor - Deming, Lewis Mann - Ralph - Longlist Ken M. Hall*

Does history repeat itself? I don't need to remind you that the same sort of farm problems have been bobbing up ever since and the war time problems of today have an amazing resemblance to those of 25 years ago. Remember what Mr. O'Neal said in the speech just quoted? Well here is a sentence from a speech made by a Georgia farmer at the 11th annual Southern Fertilizer Conference in Atlanta just a month ago:

"The American Farmer is ready to assume his share of responsibility for feeding the world but he expects a share of the profits equal to that of the retailer, wholesaler and manufacturer". He pointed out that the retail ~~pricing~~ <sup>price</sup> of food is now 34% higher than in 1947 but that the farmer is taking a 2% lower price for his products.

In 1942 farmers were pushed to grow Food for Freedom, so much so that we were encouraged to put out a special issue of The Farmer-Stockman devoted to the cause right after the Farm Bureau was organized. Two weeks

ago an Associated Press story out of Washington told how Congress has recently raised the farmer's stake in a changing world and that Food for Freedom is being advocated again. The farmer is still hoping to come out ahead in the business of feeding the world. He hasn't yet! *And so history repeats the lesson that we haven't solved the farm problem.* Many of the changes that have taken place in the past 25 years were inevitable, such as the increase in size of farms and reduction in numbers attributed largely to the impact of such farm progress as mechanization and use of chemicals.

In 1900 the census reported Oklahoma territory and Indian territory had a combined total of 108,000 farms. This increased to an all time high of 213,000 in 1935. Then it took a sharp drop of more than 15%, so that when the Farm Bureau was organized the number was down to just under 180,000. Since that time, the number has declined another 92,000, ~~so that~~ we had only 88,000 farms in Oklahoma as of the 1964 census, just released. We probably have fewer today.

~~So~~ <sup>in</sup> since the Farm Bureau was organized <sup>in</sup> 1942, Oklahoma has been losing an average of 10 farms a day, Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays included, through wars, peace, drouth, floods, high prices, low prices, acreage allotments, no acreage allotments, bumper crops, and crop failures. That's going down about as rapidly as anything can go down gradually.

Times have changed in a lot of other ways, both good and bad. And the <sup>Oklahoma</sup> Farm Bureau has been instrumental in bringing about <sup>much</sup> ~~many~~ of the

good and ~~have~~<sup>has</sup> helped to prevent many bad things that might have come to pass without your farm organization, ~~but~~<sup>But</sup> some could not be stopped.

Before 1940, farmers were poor in dollars but rich in freedom. Now they have more inflated dollars but have to ask Uncle Sam for permission on more of their operations.

In the old days, we had ~~rural~~<sup>friendly</sup> neighborhoods, with local schools, churches with real religion, and treasured our independence. Now we might not know the man who farms the next section of land, schools have moved to town, the United States Supreme Court seems to be trying to outlaw God, and Federal Aid has supplanted self-reliance.

A generation ago, majority rule was still considered to be the basis of democracy. Now minorities have taken over, and we have seen the spectacle of the President pushing a wheat program through a rubber stamp Congress after the growers themselves had voted it down in a nationwide referendum. Is this the kind of freedom our nation was dedicated to preserve? Is this representative government of the people, by the people, and for the people?

Most of us can remember when our government consisted of a legislative, an executive and a judicial branch of government to serve as checks and balances on each other. Now the executive division calls the plays, writes the checks, and the judicial does the balance. Congress provides the stamps.....rubber stamps, that is! *An Oklahoma City Civic leader said last week the govt is issuing bonds against next generation to pay debts of last generation.*

The farm problem is still with us just as it was 25 years ago, 50 years ago, and 5000 years ago. Man has always had a problem in getting his family and his food to come out even. Most wars are started by men

who play their greed for power against the hunger of the people. And the world has not yet won the war against hunger.

What is the answer? I think that AFBF president Charles B. Shuman hit the nail on the head when he visited Oklahoma City a month ago to talk to a newspaper convention. He said then that current farm control programs are not geared to modern day agriculture <sup>and they are not geared</sup> ~~or~~ to increased world food demands. He pointed out that present Federal programs are a conglomeration of measures developed during the depression of the 1930's and patched up repeatedly in the years since.

He expressed the belief that this is a good time to get rid of unsuccessful wheat and feed grains programs. David A. Martin, writing for the Associated Press, recently stated that a number of private polls indicate there is a growing belief among farmers that perhaps there is not as much need for government farm aid programs as in the recent past.

Probably both Mr. Shuman and Mr. Martin are correct in their observations, <sup>and perhaps the recent election partially substantiated the opinion,</sup> but a great many political obstacles stand in the way. <sup>(nine members of the House agricultural committee were defeated, including the chairman)</sup>

Unfortunately, farm programs always have been geared to the past.

Just as the number of automobiles increase faster than roads can be built, ~~always~~ <sup>perpetually</sup> leaving us with an inadequate highway system, so does the farming picture change more rapidly than Congress can pass laws to deal with farm problems. The program always seems to be behind the times in basic thinking, and farther behind in workable solutions.

It might be noted that, up to this time, farm organizations have not been able to get a completely practical forward looking farm program enacted into law nor have ~~the~~ <sup>we</sup> been able to get obsolete <sup>farm laws</sup> ~~ones~~ entirely eliminated. *Farm laws should be based on what farming is going to be; not on what it used to be.*

Furthermore, it is obvious that ~~the~~ <sup>our</sup> politicians in Congress do not intend to do anything that would eliminate the farm problem from their list of campaign issues about which they can talk much and do little.

They do not intend to solve the farm problem, *and they do not intend to get the government out of agriculture.*

~~And~~ in the third place, the general public doesn't care very much one way or the other, just so they can eat all they want and complain about what it costs. This is true even though food is a bargain and even though city people make more money out of farm commodities than farmers do. Current reports show that city people get 62¢ of the consumer's food dollar for transportation, processing, packaging, wholesaling, warehousing, and retailing while the farmers get 38¢ out of the consumer's food dollar.

Where the politicians have traditionally and customarily erred is in the apparent belief that they could, by enacting devious laws, go back to the life that was in farming, or at least ~~to~~ maintain the good things of the status quo. In a recent speech, the Secretary of Agriculture referred to what he called the helpful programs through which government helps citizens to lay the foundation stones of a great society as "creative federalism". *(get that! creative federalism!)* He went to Alaska to make this speech, and that may be one reason it leaves me cold!

Probably the biggest mistake that American farmers ever made was to ~~conclude~~ <sup>believe the political fairy tale</sup> that their problems could be solved better by the Federal government than by farmers working together through their own organizations.

The Federal government cannot farm and is not qualified to tell farmers how to farm. The Federal government can't even run a good postal system, when it has complete control, civil service, and 100% subsidy, ~~as needed.~~ <sup>We could also mention the weather Bureau, the Bureau of the Census, et al., but boy can it run a check-writing machine!</sup>

Recently a former USDA official published a booklet called "The Farmers' Five Worst Years", using official statistics to show how poorly farmers are faring compared with the past and with others <sup>businessmen</sup> in the present economy. The most outrageous charge he made was that the USDA deliberately took steps to reduce farm income in order to win support of voters in the city. And the USDA is supposed to be a representative and friend of the farmers in the national government.

Well, this is the year that <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~ agricultural economy is changing from surplus <sup>es</sup> to shortages. Only cotton lint and tobacco <sup>now</sup> are in surplus, while the world clamors for us to send them food. The fact is that we haven't had as much surplus food for a long time as we may have been led to believe, because considerable quantities of commodities are needed as working stocks and reserve supplies. Those items that were surplus are not there in abundance any longer.

Nevertheless, we still have a problem of maintaining a workable balance between supply and demand. With all of its legislation, Congress has been unable to repeal or nulify the law of supply and demand.

This speech admittedly has a pessimistic tone. But there is a brighter side. I believe that there are opportunities for a prosperous future in Oklahoma agriculture. I believe that there is a chance that we may turn again to the principles upon which this nation was founded in freedom, with equal opportunity for all.

It depends on what we do; not on what we decide to do. A resolution is useful and effective only when it is followed by tangible action.

We can't forecast or plan a farm program for the future without some speculation about what farms and farmers will be like in the days to come.

We can anticipate that farms will be bigger, fewer, more skillfully managed by better educated farmers. They will use more capital, will be more specialized and more highly mechanized, using computers to help figure out problems of planting, production and marketing. Consumers will be demanding more <sup>ready-to-eat</sup> convenience foods, so that more of their housework will be done for them and counted in the grocery bill. Farmers will use more credit to grow bigger crops and more livestock, but they will still be operating family farms because most of the shares of stock in their farm corporation~~s~~ will be owned by members of the operators' families. Growers will be tuned to use research results much more quickly, and there will be a great deal more chemistry involved in farming. Agriculture is not a declining industry, but it will continue to be a changing industry.

Oklahoma agriculture did not begin with the run of 1889, because our state has been a producer of food for the people since the first Indians appeared on the prairies. Our economy has always been based upon the land.

All of our new wealth comes from the soil. That includes Crops, livestock, timber, minerals, petroleum, water, and PEOPLE! In spite of government help, with these resources we might be able to do some things to help ourselves to a fair share of our <sup>nations</sup> ~~main~~ prosperity.

In the future, because of the smaller number of farms, the competition for land will be intensified. Young men will have to train as hard for agriculture as for banking, law, medicine and other professions. Many farm boys will have to seek career opportunities in agriculturally related lines. In fact, it is in this area that our largest opportunities ~~from~~ rest for both city and country Oklahomans. We must build new industries to process and market more of our farm commodities. At the present time, ~~as~~ throughout our state's history, practically all of our raw materials---oil, gas, coal, timber, crops, livestock, minerals---are exported to be processed into finished products by people in other states. Often these people grew up and were educated in Oklahoma but had to seek employment elsewhere because we are behind in our industrial development of agriculture.

Are the industrialists, financiers, and businessmen in these other states smarter or shrewder than Oklahomans? Probably not, but they act like it, and they deposit the cash difference in the bank! That difference is the value of raw materials produced in Oklahoma and the value of finished products made from them for sale to consumers. Other states make a profit from it; we don't, simply because they do it and we don't.

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Marketing Association is a move in this direction, but it is still only a start on a task of monumental size.

If we want to take advantage of our opportunities, and to preserve opportunities for our children and our grandchildren, we must return to the fundamental virtues upon which this nation was founded, those virtues which made it possible for the United States to achieve the highest standard of living that common people have ever had in the world's history. Unless we do this, the United States of America may, in the not too distant future, be going down in history as just

another nation that rose and fell because its people could not stand prosperity.

A prominent historian has pointed out that most democracies last about 200 years. They are conceived, he said, and developed by simple vigorous idealistic hardworking people who, unfortunately, with success become rich and decadent, learn to live without labor, depend more on the largess of big government and end by trading domestic tyrants for foreign tyrants.

In this connection, another writer recently asserted that ~~we face~~ *our nation now faces* dangers much more persistent and insidious than fantastic space-age weapons. He named two: one from without, communist ideology and economic penetration, and the other from within, the loss of our individual freedoms by a willingness to let the central government be all things to all people.

In the United States, our greatest assets and our most formidable defense weapons against both of these hazards are our nation's agriculture and our traditional ~~self-reliance~~ self-reliance and individual freedom <sup>*of enterprise.*</sup> Our ability to produce more than we can eat is an oddity in world history and it is one thing that we have which is more envied around the world than any other of our many resources.

In Oklahoma, agriculture is our greatest industry, but it has achieved far less than its potential. Our whole social, political, economic and moral structure depends upon the continued success of our agriculture in producing plenty to eat. It is upon our agriculture that the future of

Oklahoma rests. As citizens, we have a responsibility to make it succeed. Everyone of us can benefit from its expansion in production, in processing, in marketing, and in providing jobs for our young people. Agriculture is both rural and urban in Oklahoma, and when agriculture prospers, everybody will share in its wealth.

There was a real need for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau when it was organized 25 years ago. It was a need to help farmers and stockmen obtain ~~maximum income~~ and enjoy fair returns on their labor and investment.

It seems to me that there is an even greater need today for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau to move forward with a strong, aggressive and progressive program to reach this still elusive goal. The Farm Bureau also is needed to help preserve our individual ~~liberty~~ <sup>to protect</sup> liberty, free enterprise, and to save our nation from those forces that are trying to destroy it, both from without and from within.

Let us dedicate ourselves anew to the ideals of Christianity, freedom, and independence, not only to conserve these desirable qualities and principles for our own country, but that they might also be spread into other nations on other continents, and that there might be peace and plenty all around the world!