

Deering Recommended Changes 30 Years Ago

SOMETIMES it takes a while to get changes made in the federal bureaucracy. Maybe 30 years isn't too long to wait from the time changes are called for until they are implemented.

Ferdie Deering, editorial director of *The Farmer-Stockman* is happy to see some of his recommendations, made in the 1940s for improving U.S. Department of Agriculture services to farmers, being put into effect in 1974. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz announced in late November plans for consolidating local offices of USDA to improve services and cut costs.

Deering and *The Farmer-Stockman* magazines which he edited for more than 30 years, have been recognized recently for early efforts to improve USDA operations. Recommendations for improving services and cutting costs first were made in the early 1940s in a series of articles in *The Farmer-Stockman*. In 1945 they were published as a book.

Commendations for Deering and *The Farmer-Stockman* have come from many sources, in and out of government. The Congressional Record for Dec. 11, 1973, contains comments by Congressman Paul Findley of Illinois. One paragraph reads: "The recent announcement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture establishing U.S. Agricultural Service Centers at the local level throughout the

country in order to provide one-stop service to farmers, ranchers and rural residents makes Ferdie Deering look like a genuine prophet. In 1945, in a book entitled, 'USDA—Manager of American Agriculture,' Mr. Deering recommended doing exactly what the Department of Agriculture now proposes to do with the establishment of these service centers."

In late December, Joseph R. Wright Jr., Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for administration, came to Oklahoma to visit with Ferdie Deering about the reorganization and consolidation of local USDA offices. On meeting Deering, Wright said, "I've been quoting you all over the country and haven't even met you."

In their discussions Wright told Deering he had tried to estimate the cost of operating USDA field offices. In 1945 he said he thought the total was about \$60 million a year. Last year, 1973, with fewer farmers and fewer USDA employees, the cost ran about \$575 million.

Wright also said Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz hopes to complete the reorganization plan for USDA within two years.

The plan for reorganizing local field offices of USDA calls for combining 7,800 local offices of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Farmers Home Adminis-

tration and the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation into single offices in place of the present four independent offices. Personnel and equipment will be pooled under a single field office administrator.

In the first announcement of the reorganization of field offices it was estimated by Secretary Butz \$40 million a year could be saved by the consolidation. A primary benefit also will be convenience for farmers and stockmen who regularly transact business with several USDA field offices.

In many states, field offices already have been housed in single buildings or in adjacent offices. Nationwide, 54 percent of the offices are under one roof now.

The new plan, however, calls for consolidation of employees, a single administrator for each field office, common use of equipment and facilities and elimination of duplication of services if they exist.

In his book published in 1945, Ferdie Deering specifically recommended the kind of plan which is now being put into operation by USDA. "Local representatives of USDA should have no option except to work together to serve the farmers,"

In his concluding remarks entered in the Congressional Record, Congressman Findley says: "The Secretary of Agriculture has announced that state administrative committees com-



Ferdie J. Deering holds book in which he recommends changes in USDA.

posed of the heads of the four agencies will develop plans for each state to establish these agriculture service centers at the local level. Their aim is just what Mr. Deering envisioned to provide better service to farmers and people in rural America. There is no sinister effort to wipe out jobs and services. The program is just what Mr. Deering recommended 28 years ago. I understand that the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture has been trying to get something like this done for 30 years and I think it is time that something is done."

"I commend Mr. Deering's book and his vision to all members of this body."

from THE FARMER-STOCKMAN magazines, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas

February 1974

written by Ernest Shiner

editor-in-chief