

Farmers Upset by 'Agricultural Experts

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Ford, Meany Grain Sales Talk Criticized

By Ferdie J. Deering

If the United States government completes a contemplated long term agreement for selling grain to Russia, look for two vital provisions: Lower prices for farmers and credit for Russia.

Administration spokesmen have indicated that they think such an agreement would "stabilize grain prices at home, reducing political criticism of sales to the Soviets."

Fixed, low prices for food grains have been urged by labor union bosses, self-appointed consumer group spokesmen and by bakers. There might be little inducement for Russia to sign a long contract at high prices, because they might go down.

Russia negotiated for American credit terms on part of the grain the Soviets bought in 1972, and they would not be reluctant to demand easy terms to pay for future purchases, particularly when an American government agent is trying to sell.

Petroleum a Long Shot

There has been talk of Russia providing this country with petroleum to offset costs of grain, but it is just talk. So far, no outline of possible terms has been made.

These are some of the considerations farmers have in mind regarding marketing complications created separately and jointly by the administration and labor unions.

President Ford's recent meeting and agreement with AFL-CIO President George Meany is regarded by farm leaders as either a serious oversight or a tactical error. Agriculture was not represented when Ford and Meany agreed on how to sell farmers' grain.

Subsequently, a delegation of farm organization leaders obtained a hearing with the President. It did not change anything, in spite of blunt, plain talk in the conference.

Colorful Comment

William J. Kuhfuss, Illinois farmer and president of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), said, "The labor unions do not produce

any grain. The State Department does not produce any grain. The U.S. government does not have any grain in storage. These facts should be made known to the president of the AFL-CIO, who has repeatedly referred to 'our grain' in promoting the union ban on sales to the Soviet Union."

Roger Fleming, AFBF executive secretary who visited Oklahoma during the past week, had a colorful comment about the administration's action on Meany's advice concerning grain exports, instead of listening to farm spokesmen who had supported the President.

Fleming said it might be likened to a gentleman taking his wife to a dance and then having another woman announce over the loudspeaker that the gentleman was going home with her.

Last Tuesday, the board of directors of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau adopted a resolution that really laid the feud between agriculture and union labor out in the open. It struck at the special privileges enjoyed by unions, as contrasted to anti-trust and other restraints placed on industries and businesses.

Exemption Urged

"Uranium fuels, tractor factory parts and other export items are allowed to move to Russia, unhindered by Mr. Meany's philosophical differences with Russia, while Big Labor stops our wheat from moving, to 'protect the American consumer,'" the resolution said.

The National Association of Wheat Growers has called for exemption of wheat from the embargo on grain sales to Russia. "There has never been any economic justification for banning wheat sales," said Don Woodward of Oregon, president.

The Oklahoma Farmers Union president,

George Stone, says "we drift from one crisis to another with farmers and consumers left in a complete state of confusion." Farmers Union recommends that the U.S. government take the lead to develop and establish a new international trade agreement.

"Such an agreement should be in the form of a multilateral treaty, under which exporting countries and importing countries would assume reciprocal obligations to each other in exchange for benefits from each other," Stone said.

Control Lost

At the recent National Public Policy Education Conference in New York, Dr. Luther Tweeten, regents professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Oklahoma State University, said, "The agricultural establishment has temporarily lost more than control of its policy agenda; it has lost control of farm policy itself."

Tweeten said labor unions have been "the most articulate spokesmen for consumer causes," and he cited a new set of "agricultural experts" as an outgrowth of the philosophy that "agriculture is too important to be left to agriculturists."

There is much more to this incipient war between agriculture and labor, but farmers and ranchers will need a lot of help from other industries and businesses if they are to slow the drive to nationalize and control prices and distribution of farm products.

One observer may have had a desperate feeling of either futility or cynicism when he commented that farmers made a mistake in talking with the President. "They should have gone over his head and talked to Meany," he declared, somewhat wryly.

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