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Agricultural Establishment Feels Loss of Control in Forming Policy

A POLITICAL tug-of-war is going on to determine who will control agriculture, and producers are being yanked off their feet by people whose thinking is alien to farmer thinking and tradition.

Our nation and the world will suffer if agriculture loses its voice, and there is a very real danger that may happen. In a paper presented at the recent National Public Policy Education Conference in New York, Dr. Luther Tweeten of Oklahoma State University, waded right into this subject. He is regents professor in

OSU's Department of Agricultural Economics.

"The agricultural establishment has temporarily lost more than control of its policy agenda; it has lost control of farm policy itself," Dr. Tweeten said for an opener. "The terms 'national food policy' and 'food and farm policy' are now widely used as euphemisms for farm policy tilted toward consumer interests."

The case for emphasizing consumer interests has solid credentials in economic theory, he added, citing laws for product safety and nutrition which benefit both farmers and consumers.

"What sets recent activity apart from previous activity is unilateral consumer action not in the interests of farmers," Tweeten explained. Actions include price ceilings on farm commodities, export controls, relaxation of import quotas on dairy products and beef, and rejection of even minimally adequate price support rates for farm commodities.

"A disarray of 'consumer' advocates from George Meany to Jim Hightower engages in all manner of hyperbole and emotional appeals to base instincts, much to the consternation of more sober analysts," he continued. "Consumers justifiably want an ample quantity of high quality foods, at low and stable prices, but unscrupulous promoters give the impression that food should be organically grown solely by small farmers without use of petroleum, fertilizers or other chemicals."

Tweeten termed the International Longshoremen's Association boycott of wheat shipments to the Soviet Union on the pretext that it was inflationary "the unkindest cut of all."