

Strike By Farmers Lacks Endorsement

JUN. 25 1978

By Ferdie J. Deering

All major farm organizations have been trying to get parity prices, or close to them, as continuing goals for many years.

At a national rally of the American Agriculture Movement (AAM) in Oklahoma City a few weeks ago, an Oklaho-

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ma supporter asserted: "We've done more in eight months than any other farm organization has in the past 50 years." Many farm leaders wouldn't agree to that.

This writer has interviewed officials of other farm organizations. All of them are still in business and expect to continue to serve agriculture by working toward solution of farm problems.

Endorsement of the AAM strike by what is called "established farm organizations" has been noticeably lacking. Some extended "sympathy," expressed concern, or said they had similar goals, but resolutions fell short of commitments to participate in the action.

Many Oklahoma farmers belong to both the Farmers Union and the Farm Bureau, and some to the Grange as well. A large number also belongs to one or more commodity groups, such as wheat, cattle, cotton, peanuts, hogs, sheep, pecans and soybeans.

The AAM strike generated both positive

and negative aspects. Use of the term "strike" raised suspicions of labor union ties, especially after AAM was endorsed by AFL-CIO spokesmen. Later, a supporter said "strike is not utilized as much now; it's the American Agriculture Movement now."

Criticism of other farm organizations by AAM leaders caused some bitterness. Threats of withdrawal from membership unless strike support was forthcoming were made, but apparently numbers who actually did so were nominal.

The Farm Bureau and the Farmers Union took note of the strike and the goal of better prices for farmers, but stopped there. The Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association took no action, while the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association seemed to be sympathetic but aloof.

On agricultural problems within the state, farm organizations usually are fairly well in agreement. They cooperate on many issues and projects to obtain legislation and other action.

On national issues, more differences appear. Organizations may favor profitable farm prices but their ideas about how to get them differ. None opposes parity, but practicalities enter into procedures that they may advocate as means to the goal.

The Farmers Union

favors government supported prices to assure farmers fair incomes. George Stone, Oklahoma Farmers Union president and National Farmers Union vice president, emphasizes that production must be kept in line with demand and export markets, whether prices are supported or not.

"With price supports, controls must be rigid enough to keep supply and demand together," Stone says.

Farm Bureau goals include protecting and improving farmers' incomes, relying primarily upon the market place as source of income, and allowing farmers to make decisions on their farms.

Farm Bureau policy states: "We favor a market oriented agriculture because we believe that farmers will fare better under the market system than under any type of government-managed system."

The Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association likewise favors a free enterprise system, rather than a regulated one.

"We want orderly production, orderly marketing and orderly distribution," says Ellis Freeny, executive vice president of OCA, "But we do not want the government to regulate. The quantity and quality will be there without government regulation."

Farm organizations cooperate on some national issues, in spite of

their differences. This spring, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Council of Farm Co-operatives, National Farmers Union, and the National Grange joined with other organizations to support legislation requiring handlers of farm products to bargain in good faith.

It has been suggested that farmers ought to get together and speak with one voice on what agriculture really needs and wants.

The Agriculture Council of America and Texas A&M University have called a "National Farm Summit" at College Station in December to try to do just that.

The announced aim is to bring together "the broadest possible spectrum of leadership" to provide "a national forum to identify, evaluate and movement toward agreement on solutions to current and long-range economic problems facing U.S. agriculture."

This is a laudable goal, whose achievement would require a good many compromises which might be hard to reach.

The existing farm organization alignment does not suit all, but it does leave room for differing plans and opposing opinions, while allowing cooperation on projects where agreement exists.

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