

"FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE"

Speech for Oklahoma Farm Bureau State Convention
Oklahoma City, November 27, 1979

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES & GENTLEMEN OF OK FARM BUREAU:

It is an honor to be invited to address this great organization of leaders of agriculture. I accepted the invitation with humility, because I am aware of my limitations as a speaker.

One time a civic club program chairman phoned to ask me to speak ~~to~~ his club. I responded that I was a writer, that writers generally are not good speakers, and that he should look for someone else.

A little while later he called back and said his committee had talked it over. They decided that I wasn't a good enough writer for it have much effect on my speaking and they wanted me to come and talk to them anyway.

Today I am not here to address you either as a great writer or as a great speaker, but because I have become an OLD TIMER with OK Farm Bureau. If you stick around long enough you become an OLD TIMER. Some of you ^{might} qualify in this respect also. *(Ask those who joined OFB in 1942 they want to visit with everyone.)*

My association with Farm Bureau goes back to the drouth and depression of the Dusty Thirties, when the need for such an organization developed into hope and that hope blossomed into reality.

So when Ken McFall told me that the OK Farm Bureau directors had asked that I compile a history of this fine organization, I accepted the task. It is one of the most challenging projects I have undertaken in nearly a half century of writing.



It seemed to me that the story of the pioneer spirit, rugged determination, strong character, high hopes and self-sacrifice of those who built OFB ought to be set down to inspire us and others.

It turns out that I am having a great time, too, in visiting with long time friends as we recall interesting and difficult experiences as farmers tried to make their voices heard by people who sometimes didn't seem to want to listen.

I have visited a number of Farm Bureau pioneers over the state and expect to talk with many more. Unfortunately, many whom I would like to interview no longer are available.

Records and memory supply much information about their work, however, and folks have generously made files, scrapbooks and letters available to me in my research and I know from what I have gathered already that the story of OK Farm Bureau will contain much inspiring, never-before-published material that may interest many people.

Not just names, dates and places, but also many anecdotes, some amusing and others dealing with the conflicts, mistakes, rivalries and successes or failures that are a part of peoples' lives.

Let me give you two or three brief samples. One of my favorites depicts how the lives of Farm Bureau families sometimes were complicated by the absence of somebody on Farm Bureau business.

This one deals with John I. Taylor's family back in 1942, just after he was elected president of the new Farm Bureau and had to be away days at a time, usually coming home on weekends to catch up on things at the ranch.



On this particular weekend he talked with a neighbor who planned to haul a load of livestock to market on Monday. John asked him to take along a calf he had penned in the barn and the neighbor agreed.

It so happened that the Taylor boys, Joe and Jim, were feeding another calf for a club project and it also was in the barn. Joe stayed home from school on account of illness, but when Jimmy came in he yelled up the stairs: "Where's the calf?"
he was hard to keep in bed.

You guessed it. The neighbor had hauled off the wrong calf. As quickly as someone could be found to stay with Joe, Mrs. Taylor and Jimmy started out to overtake the truck. They inquired at truck stops and phoned ahead to filling stations or cafes to ask if the trucker had been there.

Finally about 11 p.m., they located him by phone somewhere this side of Chickasha and told him: "Please don't sell that calf!"

By sunup, the truck was back on the Taylor ranch unloading a calf. Mrs. Taylor went out and asked: "Are you sure you brought back the right calf?" The neighbor grinned and replied: "I sure ~~am~~ ^{am}, Miz Taylor, cause all the other calves on that load was pigs!"

You've read about the early Farm Bureau board meeting where a major topic of discussion was whether to buy a typewriter for \$130 or to rent one for \$20 a month to go on the borrowed table in the donated office in Livestock Exchange.

But did you hear about the director who thought expenses were too high and offered a motion that would limit meals paid for by Farm Bureau to 35 cents? That motion failed because it was argued that it might be justifiable sometimes to leave a dime tip.

Directors received \$3 a day and 3 cents a mile but sometimes had to wait for money to come in from the counties in order to collect. Later these allowances were increased.

time and
Most of the traveling done was donated, however, with workers driving their own pickups, burning rationed gasoline and buying their own hamburgers when soliciting memberships or selling insurance.

When pay for board members got up to \$7.50 a day President Taylor kept a close eye on costs. Some of the board members became lax about attendance and promptness, so the president directed the secretary to record in the minutes the exact time of arrival and departure of each member. This *was done for several months and* apparently resulted in greater punctuality.

You might say that Oklahoma Farm Bureau had its inception back in the early days of the depression. Many farmers had gone broke on account of low prices before the drouth hit.

The AAA Farm Program provided some relief but in 1936 the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. Clarence Roberts, editor of The Farmer-Stockman, got a group of farmers together to form the OK Farmers Emergency Association, known as OFEA.

Carl Wright of Sentinel was president and Lyle Hague of Cherokee was secretary-treasurer. Dues were 50 cents a year. Pretty soon they had more than 5,000 letters on the way to Washington from Oklahoma farmers, urging Congress to replace the AAA with an acceptable farm relief program.

The campaign caught on in other states and soon a new farm program was enacted. OFEA continued to meet occasionally for three or four years.

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In 1938, Roberts arranged for two carloads of farmers to attend the AFBF Convention in New Orleans hoping to get help in organizing a farm bureau.

Of that group, only Lyle Hague and Frank Kubicek are living. Mr. Kubicek told me that AFBF did not provide much encouragement, saying only: "If you get organized, we'll be glad to have you join us." This disappointment did not kill the idea of having an OFB, and AFBF did come through with substantial assistance in the early years of OFB.

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Some members of the OFEA wanted to convert that organization into the OFB and others did not. The group voted to dissolve instead and members were invited to join the FB movement. Most of them did.

Clarence Roberts hammered away in his editorials to say that existing farm groups did not represent the majority of Oklahoma farmers and that better representation was needed. In November 1941 a steering committee was designated in a meeting at Ponca City, and in February 1942, county delegates got the OFB on its way at the Huckins in OKC.

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You probably couldn't have picked a worse time to start a farm organization, if you had tried. Or perhaps it was the ideal time to start one.

Farmers were just beginning to crawl out of the drouth and depression. One out of every six farmer had left the land between 1935 and 1940. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and we were at war with Germany.

The government had imposed ceiling prices on farm products, but farmers couldn't reach the ceiling.

Milk was retailing for 12 cents a quart, beef cattle were bringing less than \$10 cwt., hogs a little more. Hay was \$10 a ton, cotton 17 cents a pound and wheat brought \$1.06 bu. sometimes.

Consumers thought food cost too much and farmers thought taxes were too high. Farmers were converting from horsepower to tractor power but the war made equipment scarce and high in price. Gasoline and tires were rationed to everybody.

Besides that, farm boys and hired hands were marching off to war or going to work in defense plants. Farmers were having to pay as much as \$4 a day for harvest hands and complained they couldn't get good help even at those high wages.

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Within four days after OFB was organized, it had articles of incorporation, bylaws, directors, officers, a full time manager and an office. The dream of a representative organization for actual farmers was coming true because dedicated men worked to make it a reality.

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We must pay tribute, too, to the wives and families of Farm Bureau workers, because they stayed home to plow, herd cattle, feed hogs, tend crops and carry on the chores while the men were away. They also helped to create and build Farm Bureau.

Time will not permit personal mention today of hundreds who deserve to be remembered, but the printed narrative will contain names of many Farm Bureau heroes. These people have earned places in history just as surely as those who served in political offices or on military assignments. Each ~~one~~ served his country, his profession, and his fellow man as opportunities appeared.

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John I. Taylor was drafted to serve as the first president of OFB. He wanted nothing more than to return to his home near Saddle Mountain in the Wichitas and live quietly on his land with his family and his livestock. He sacrificed these pleasures because he saw a job that had to be done.

In 1950, Taylor wrote in the OFB Farmer magazine: "The thing that has made America the envy of the entire world is our freedom of operation. The opportunity to get ahead, the willingness to meet a given situation and overcome it. While many countries have been hamstrung by regulations, customs and traditions, we have forged ahead and done a better job. America will keep on succeeding only if we keep this basic principle."

During his 11 years as president, Taylor worked to preserve those traditions, and so have his dedicated successors, Lewis H. Munn, Billy Jarvis and Jim Lockett, ~~and~~ the other ^{directors} state and county officers, the staff and membership of OFB.

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a farm organization⁸

If we had ~~the~~ equivalent of the Heisman trophy, Lewis H. Munn probably would win it for keeps. In 33 years of continuous service on the board, from 1942 to 1975 he missed only two meetings. He carried the ball far and faithfully -

Along the way he served 22 years as president, a record that can be beaten in this century only if Jim Lockett serves until 1999 at least.

I have spent hours interviewing Mr. Munn and going over his records and scrapbooks. Some lively and colorful anecdotes have turned up and the story of his long experience in OFB is an interesting one.

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Among achievements of OFB was acquisition of property near the state capitol (there's a good story there, too), and construction of a large, modern office building to serve as headquarters for Farm Bureau activities.

Yet, that accomplishment is small compared to the enlistment of the vast majority of Oklahoma's farm and ranch families in an organization whose purpose is to enrich rural life, better the farm economy, improve agriculture across the state and nation, and preserve freedom for everyone.

Those who organized Farm Bureau 37 years ago probably did better than they knew or hoped for. They laid a solid foundation for the future of agriculture, a free agriculture in a free nation.

The foundation is firm, but the superstructure is far from completed. Even while it is still being built, enemies of agriculture and free enterprise are ripping away solid construction, trying to bring everybody and everything down to the same level of mediocrity.

Under the byline THE COWHAND, which he sometimes used, John I. Taylor summed up the philosophy of this organization as A FARM BUREAU MEMBER'S CREED. In closing, I commend it to all devoted Americans:

"I am a human being living in a land of unlimited horizon.

The obligations to my country are few---

To vote,

To defend its soil,

To help make its laws,

To obey the laws,

To render judgment upon offenders,

To pay a share of the bills,

and to do such other things as will

Promote peace, harmony and the general welfare.

"The privileges of my country are many---

To speak freely,

To meet unhindered,

To worship openly,

To travel at will,

To work at tasks of my choice,

To play at my convenience,

To visit and be visited,

To love and be loved,

To accept rewards for merit and to practice
charity.

"To forever maintain the privileges,

a solemn pledge must be taken

to fulfill the responsibilities.

"As a Farm Bureau Member,

I am willing to assume such a vow and

extend my influence by precept and example

to other people and groups,

so that our heritage may be transmitted

"Morality, selflessness and vigilance
are watchwords to be my guide,
and labor to do the task my aim.

"The bonds of tyranny shall not be my lot
nor that of any free man,

so long as God shall grant me strength
to do his will and

to cherish my full duty of American citizenship."

(END OF QUOTATION)

Oklahoma Farm Bureau will have a significant
voice in the future of America,
because as an organization
it will speak as its membership directs.

There is abundant reason to expect
that your achievements in the future will
parallel the great achievements of the past.

Those who created OFB fulfilled their
responsibilities by building
A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE.

Those of us who have responsibility
for the FUTURE face no easier tasks
but we have great opportunities.

Let us pray that we may see them,
grasp them, and use them!

THANK YOU!