

Farmers and National Policy

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Farmers and National Policy

Abstract

My discussion of "reaching national opinion/policy leaders" will focus on the Congress of the United States, for two reasons.

MAJOR PAPERS

Farmers and National Policy

DENNIS AVERY*

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED in this paper are my own, expressed in my personal capacity as a member of AAACE, and should not in any way be considered an official expression of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

My discussion of "reaching national opinion/policy leaders" will focus on the Congress of the United States, for two reasons.

First, it would be impossible to accurately assess developments across the whole spectrum of national opinion leaders without much more extensive staff and survey work than I have available.

Second, the Congress is the place where farmers have historically taken their problems. To paraphrase, farmers have long seemed to say: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the Hill, from whence cometh my help."

Because there were lots of farmers, and they were important to the economy, and had a great deal of political clout, Congress has in the past been very attentive to farmers' needs. The Homestead Act, the Morrill Act, Rural Free Delivery, and rural electrification are only a few samples of the legislative efforts to help farmers. More recently, there have been billion-dollar farm commodity programs, and the Food for Peace program which was basically set up to help dispose of farm surpluses.

Farmers are still a potent political force, and they are still able to get a good deal of attention from Congress. However, there are a number of changes taking place — in farming, in the nation and

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in Congress. *Journal of Applied Communication*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 1971, p. 2. How much, and for how long, can farmers continue to depend on Congress for solutions to their problems?" This paper will examine the evidence, and try to help answer that question.

This paper lacks the quantitative analysis that I would have liked to give it. Unfortunately, I have found very few numbers that shed much light on the situation. For example, I have been repeatedly told by Congress-watchers that the average Congressman is getting younger; but this trend is masked by the advancing age of some of the senior members who continue to hold their seats well past the Federal retirement age. Voting patterns are also difficult to compare. The 1965 farm act was sponsored by a Democratic President and picked up big-city Democratic votes. The 1970 Act was supported by a Republican President and drew votes from suburban Republicans. But where is the trend? The 1970 Census figures that would help us analyze recent changes in the economic patterns of Congressional districts have not yet been issued.

What I have done instead is to interview a number of people who professionally watch the Congress, along with some of the Congressmen themselves and members of their staffs. Some of these people have a special interest in agriculture. Others do not. But the summation of their views is highly useful to agricultural communicators in a crucial transition period for farmers and rural people.

I will include numbers where relevant, but the paper is more an in-depth feature story than a quantified research study.

Rural Problems

Farmers in the United States today have at least their fair share of economic, social and political problems.

Probably the most important problem facing farmers is the same one with which they've been struggling for 50 years — living with the technological revolution in farming and agribusiness.

The full force of the technological revolution in farming struck in the 1930's. The lightweight gasoline tractor replaced the horse — and freed 90 million acres of land from producing fodder to produce food and fiber. Hybrid corn and inexpensive commercial fertilizer came into widespread use, along with many other improvements that boosted farm productivity.

Unfortunately, this rush of farm technology came just at a time when restrictive tariffs had cut back world trade, and when the Great Depression was cutting demand for farm products at home.

Just as serious, the new technology displaced farmers. The man-hours invested in each acre of corn dropped from 35 in 1910-14 to 19 in 1935-39. Wheat man-hours per acre dropped from 15 to less than 9. Since each farmer could now produce more, we needed fewer farmers.

Farming became in a sense the world's largest game of musical chairs. Farmers have had to compete with each other for a declining number of places in farming . . . and each new technological advance tends to take a few more chairs out of the game that is still going on. Our farm population has been declining at the rate of about four per cent a year for the last 20 years, and a bit higher than that in the past decade.

The technological revolution in farming has also had its impact on rural communities. The number of farm families shopping in local stores has dropped off. As farmers' businesses have grown, they have often by-passed local suppliers. These changes have severely affected many rural economies. Businesses have closed. Jobs have become even scarcer – both for town residents and for farmers looking for off-farm work to supplement inadequate farm incomes.

Rural communities – already handicapped by sparse populations and low incomes – have found it harder and harder to provide schools and other social services. At the same time, such educational and social services have become even more vital to the success of their communities. Rural children need comparable educations if they are to find their economic futures in competition with young people from larger communities. Rural development efforts are handicapped if they cannot offer new industry the services and amenities they consider necessary.

These problems are at the core of the rural dilemma.

Solutions to the problems depend heavily on the national policies – on farm programs, on foreign trade negotiations, on monetary policy, on labor legislation and tax regulations, on our welfare and income policies, and other national policy decisions.

These policies will be established by the national government, and particularly by Congress and the President. It is difficult to speculate on trends in the Presidency, but there are some very

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significant trends developing in Congress, that have important implications for farmers and rural people, and the solutions to their problems.

Urbanization

The United States was originally a rural nation. Ninety per cent of the population probably lived on farms at the time of the Revolution. As recently as 1920, the majority of our people were rural. Today, we are an urban nation, with 95 per cent of our population living off the farm.

One of the biggest changes affecting farmers and their ability to get favorable legislation is the sheer weight of the urban population that is building up. We now have about 10 million people living on farms, and 195 million living off the farm.

That does not make agriculture unimportant. But it certainly diminishes agriculture's political clout. There are simply not as many farm voters. In the current Congress, only 31 Representatives (and no Senators) have as many as 25 per cent of their voters living on farms.

Actually, the political power of farmers has stayed surprisingly strong during this period of declining farm population. There are several reasons for this. Many non-farm people have felt sympathetic with farmers. Many of them grew up on farms, or their parents grew up on farms, or they had other relatives who were farmers. Rural ties have been fairly strong.

Then, too, the farmer for a very long time has had a favorable image as a beneficial force in our culture . . . the "sturdy yeoman" image, if you will. Farmers have been considered independent, hard-working, solid citizens. There's little doubt that they earned the image. They have also been thought of as small, low-income businessmen in an essential industry — deserving of public help.

Another reason for the farmer's continued political strength has been more tangible. Until very recently, farmers have had more representation per capita than urban people. Until the one-man-one-vote decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1964, Representatives from rural districts tended to serve smaller populations than urban Representatives.

The one-man-one-vote decision is likely to be extremely important to farmers in the long run, since it is forcing states to re-

district whenever the Census indicates that population shifts have altered the pattern of representation. Every state with more than one Congressman had to redistrict after the 1964 decision, and practically all of these will have to redistrict again on the basis of the 1970 Census. In almost every redistricting so far, urban voters gained representation and rural voters lost. The *Washington Post*, in reporting on the new Census preliminary figures, identified 181 "rural" Congressional districts in the U.S. as of 1966; estimated that number had declined to 155 by 1968, and projected 144 rural districts by 1972 . . . out of a House of Representatives numbering 435.

Forty-nine Congressmen and Senators now list themselves as farmers, compared with 72 in 1955.

Decline in rural representation has probably been even sharper than these figures indicate. They don't indicate the pre-1964 situation (changing Census data bases make that comparison difficult).

In 1960, two-thirds of the Congressional districts were made up of whole county units — reflecting lower population densities and an era when administrative convenience was as important as equity in representation. In 1970, just 10 years later, only one-third of our Congressional districts consisted of whole counties.

The Census figures for 1970 also indicate an unexpectedly heavy "exurban" movement. Exurbanites are people who live in rural areas beyond the suburbs, but are economically dependent on the urban economy rather than the rural one. During the 1960's non-metropolitan counties peripheral to metropolitan ones grew about 11 per cent, while non-metro counties **not** on the periphery grew only three per cent.

What this means is that even Congressmen in "rural" districts are now representing more non-rural people and interests than they used to.

States that will lose Congressional seats as a result of the 1970 Census include Alabama, Iowa, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The seats they are losing will typically go to a metropolitan area in a "Sun Belt" state: Arizona (Phoenix); California (five seats) (Los Angeles-San Diego); Colorado (Denver); Florida (three seats) (Miami-West Palm Beach-Tampa); and Texas (Houston). Connecticut also picks up one seat.

Concern About Agriculture Declining

Another trend that seems to be underway in the nation is a decreasing concern about agriculture. Agriculture is still one of our basic industries — but it no longer ranks in the public mind as “the” basic industry. The relative importance of other industries has increased over the years.

Farmers may feel that their diminished status is less than their due, but it is hard to argue with the fact that a great many industries besides agriculture contribute to the affluent standard of living in modern America.

A smaller proportion of our population is directly dependent on agriculture for a living than in past years. As the years go by, a smaller percentage of our citizens will have had any direct connection with farming.

Finally, the very certainty of our food supply today encourages urban people to take it for granted. The productive capacity of our agriculture and the protection against crop failure that comes from irrigation, pest and weed control, and the other technological protections now available make this almost inevitable. Last year’s outbreak of Southern corn leaf blight and the threat of blight this year mean possibly higher meat prices for consumers; but even this major agricultural disaster does not threaten our consumers’ basic food supply.

At the same time that concern about agriculture is declining, the concern about urban problems is increasing. We are facing a major breakdown in our urban support systems. Our rail system seems headed for wholesale bankruptcy as its rails and its rolling stock wear out . . . and its management is hobbled with outdated labor regulations and rate-making restraints.

Our highways are inadequate to carry the flows of commuters in and out of the cities; there is no parking for the cars if the highways were adequate, and evidently our ecology couldn’t stand the smog that would result if the first two bottlenecks didn’t exist. We’ve had no breakthrough in urban mass transit since the subway . . . and the first subway in the United States was built in New York before the turn of the century.

A quick run-through of recent headlines also finds massive pollution problems, dope addiction, strikes by public employees, riots, marches by welfare recipients, loss of tax bases to the suburbs, and many, many more.

Urban people don't have much concern to spare for the farmer anymore. Avery: Farmers and National Policy

As a matter of fact, the farmer will be lucky if farm programs don't draw the interest of urban groups — as a source of money for urban programs. The budgets of the most obvious targets have already been attacked — NASA, the Defense Department, and foreign aid programs. Agriculture could be next.

The Impact of a Changing Agriculture

The changing nature of American agriculture also makes a difference in the ability of farmers to get their way with the Congresses of today and tomorrow.

The fact that farmers are getting fewer in number, of course, is the most obvious factor, already discussed in terms of the growing urbanization of America.

We've also discussed the farmer's declining representation in Congress.

Another trend that seems certain to have its impact in time is the growing commercialization of agriculture. We no longer have 7 million small general farms scattered across the countryside—each basically similar to the next. We have no more than 1 million commercial farms (using a cut-off point of \$10,000 in annual gross sales, which is certainly a modest standard for any modern American business). These million commercial farms average more than \$170,000 in production assets, and in 1969 (most recent data available) families living on these farms averaged nearly \$16,000 in net income. This figure is well above the national average, of course, and not likely to incite too much sympathy in Congressional hearts.

Today's commercial farmer is not operating 40 acres with a mule. He's running a business, and it often involves big glass-lined silos, stainless steel milking parlors, six-plow tractors and air-conditioned combines.

Congress has already shown an unwillingness to support the same kinds of programs for large farmers that they have underwritten in the past for smaller farmers. The Agricultural Act of 1970 includes a limitation on payments of \$55,000 per person per crop for cotton, wheat, and feed grains—the first payment limitation ever included in farm program legislation. There is currently

a strong effort to lower that limit to \$20,000, and even that may not be the end.

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As commercial farmers get larger and more highly capitalized, they become more like other businesses and have less of the special character that led to special efforts for farmers in the first place.

Incidentally, one of the little-understood factors that may have had a large impact on farm and rural legislation is the Census definition of a farm. Currently, for census purposes, a property is defined as a farm if it has more than 10 acres or sells more than \$250 annually worth of farm products. Statisticians are thus able to define about 3 million farms for the United States today. Dividing net farm income by 3 million farms gives an average of \$5,437 per farm for 1969. In contrast, commercial farms averaged \$11,940 in net farm income. The suspicion that the other 2 million "farms" include a great many hobby farms and rural residences is strengthened by the fact that the 2 million non-commercial farms averaged \$6,175 in off-farm income and only \$1,761 in farm income.

The Census Bureau also makes a survey of current occupational status, in which respondents are asked to name their jobs. At the same time that Census was counting more than 3 million farms, only about 1.5 million Americans said they were farmers or farm managers.

The Census Bureau is planning to re-define the term "farm" for the 1974 Census of Agriculture. It could make a radical difference in the statistics that farm groups have been using to make their case with Congress.

The Farmers' Hand in the Public Pocket

The farmer is under continuing attack for having his "hand in the public pocket." A recent study by Dr. Charles Schultze of the Brookings Institution stated that the public cost of our farm commodity programs totaled between 9 and 10 billion dollars a year. (He combined about \$4.5 billion in government outlays with an estimate of the increased food prices he said consumers pay because the programs hold down production.) The study also noted that three-quarters of the benefits of the programs go to farmers whose incomes are above the national average. Dr. Schultze is a former Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and a respected economist.

The *Reader's Digest* ^{Temporary Farmers and National Policy} on farm subsidies frequently, and the subsidies are attacked by many people in many ways. All of this does not do the farmer's image any good. Over time, this may come to be a more serious problem than it is today.

The subsidy problem is perhaps compounded by the fact that USDA's budget includes several billion dollars for food stamps, school lunches, environmental protection, meat and poultry inspection, and other programs of direct benefit to the general public.

Farmers Divided on Policy

Farmers do not agree on the type of legislation they want Congress to pass for them. This may be one of the most serious factors cutting into the ability of farmers to get favorable programs passed. However, I have not mentioned this factor more prominently because it has been true for many years and is unlikely to change.

One group of farmers maintains that agriculture would be better off if the government terminated its current farm programs. Another sizable group of farmers says that this would be suicide and that the government must increase its efforts if farmers are to get adequate incomes.

Both views are deeply and sincerely held. There are experts testifying on both sides. Neither side shows signs of giving up.

However, the Congressman who would like to vote for farmers finds himself in a difficult position: which way to vote when farmers are telling him to vote both ways? If an urban Congressman doesn't really want to vote a certain way on a farm question, opposition among farmers lets him off the hook.

If farmers were agreed on the program they would like passed, their chances of getting it would be somewhat improved. Having uttered this truism, we can now concede that it will not happen and get on to more relevant matters.

Farmers' Contribution to Society

Dr. Dale Hathaway of Michigan State University wrote in 1967, "In the past, a good deal of support for farm programs has come from nonfarm groups who believed that farm people made a special contribution to political, economic, and social stability,

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economic growth and social justice in our society. It appears, however, that the long-standing ideas regarding agriculture's special contributions to the achievement of these values is rapidly being replaced by a radically different set of beliefs. The bitter struggle over civil rights, with its roots in the rural South, is convincing most people that rural people have no monopoly on justice or on concern for equality.

"The shameful treatment of some migrant workers has confirmed these feelings. The difficulties of assimilating the rural migrants in large cities have convinced many that the virtues of rural upbringing are hardly sufficient to offset poor schools. And the enthusiasm of numerous rural areas for extreme right-wing political candidates has done little to convince the general population that farmers add greatly to the stability of our political system."

Impact of a Changing Congress

The Congress of the United States is changing too. It is changing very slowly; it is changing more slowly than political scientists expected it would; but it is changing.

The changes have implications for farm and rural people and will likely affect their ability to get the kinds of legislation they want.

Herbert Harris, former legislative expert for the Farm Bureau, says, "Since 1955, when I started working with Congress, there's been a dramatic and profound change in the Congressman, his constituents, and his method of work. Today, he's younger and better educated. Increasingly, he represents suburbs, and less and less either an urban or rural district. Many of them give lip service to farm constituents, but agriculture has no real priority. The real test of this is how often the House Agriculture Committee has had to nearly draft new members."

As Harris and others point out, committee assignments are life and breath to a Congressman. They give him his best opportunity to make an impact on legislation, and his best opportunity to make a name for himself with his constituents. Once, seats on the agriculture committees were hotly contested. Recently, the Committee on Committees in the House has often found it difficult to fill the Agriculture membership. Members often resign from Agriculture to accept more prestigious appointments, sacri-

ficing seniority to do so. Even Rep. Paul Findley of Illinois, who represents a rich farming district and has written a book on farm policy, resigned from the Agriculture Committee when forced to choose between that and Foreign Affairs (he now sits on both).

The Senate Agriculture Committee has recently created new sub-committees on Rural Development and Foreign Trade, at least in part to give its members more scope than they have had in the past and make the Committee more attractive. (Senator Hubert Humphrey promptly accepted the Rural Development chairmanship, indicating where he thinks the political priorities are heading.)

"Being a Congressman has become a full-time and desirable job," says Andrew Glass of the *National Journal*. He points out that the job now pays \$42,500 a year, and even junior Congressmen have \$300,000 a year to spend on staff, and 15 authorized job slots for assistants and secretaries. Senior members can draw on committee staffs in addition. Senators also make \$42,500 and may have 8 to 48 staff members (depending primarily on the size of their State).

The money and the staff make it easier to do a good job . . . and make it more difficult to defeat an incumbent. Today's member can look forward to a longer tenure than before. Glass says that 95 per cent of the incumbent House members who ran in the 1970 election **won**.

Not so long ago (1966), Congressional pay was only \$22,500, and the staff allowance was smaller. Legislative sessions used to be shorter too, and the Congressman was also expected to spend six or seven months of the year in his home district—meaning his family often stayed behind when he went to Washington. Today, the legislative sessions generally last throughout the year to accommodate the increasingly complex governmental process—and the Congressman can move his family to Washington and tend to his job on more of a full-time basis.

The Congressional retirement plan has also been sharply improved.

All of these factors—higher pay, better tenure, better living and working situation—mean that capable people now leave successful law practices or responsible executive jobs to run for Congress.

The average Congressman today is younger, though the youth trend has been masked in the averages of Congressional age

by the longevity of some of the older Congressmen who have achieved remarkable seniority. The Senate is a **much** younger body today than 10 years ago, Glass says—both in average age and in the age of its power centers (Bayh, Hatfield, Brooke, etc.).

The Congressman today probably takes a more professional approach to his job, too. Several observers commented on the fact that new members seem more oriented toward problem-solving.

The party is still important to a Congressman or Senator, but for several reasons he probably now feels less tied to the party than he once did. One reason is television. (Incidentally, several observers also pointed out that Congressmen are getting better looking.) Another factor is the mobility of our population. Today's electorate is better-educated and probably has a somewhat wider range of interests. All of these factors encourage the elected representative to take a broader stance and handle issues conceptually.

One of the difficult trends to assess is in Congressional organization. Both the Senate and the House (but particularly the House) have been held under rigid rules of seniority for a number of years. This seniority has put enormous power in the hands of a relatively few members who have managed to stay in Congress longer than anyone else. Seniority has had the advantage of preventing intra-Congressional power struggles, but there now seems to be a feeling among the rank and file membership that it has been carried too far.

During the last session of Congress several changes were made that weakened the power of the Congressional Establishment. It is too early yet to say for certain that these changes represent a trend but they very well may.

Straws in the wind: the Congressional Reorganization Bill passed last year liberalizing the voting rules in the House. One of the most significant aspects of the bill is that an amendment—permitting any member to call for **recorded** teller voting on any bill—was inserted on the floor over the objections of the leadership, and was passed. This teller voting amendment enables any member to put his colleagues on record about their voting, and could make it much more difficult to get special deals passed through the House. The amendment has already helped to defeat the SST project.

The party caucuses are also becoming more active. Recently

the House Agriculture, Armed Services, and District of Columbia Committees have accepted members who generally oppose the stance of the committee chairmen to forestall open challenges to the committee leadership. The *Wall Street Journal* on June 7 reported that, "At the insistence of House Speaker Carl Albert, five liberal Democrats were recently added to the (Appropriations Committee) to ease the conservatives' hammerlock on appropriations. More often now, some members are breaching the committee's long tradition of trying to settle all fights within the panel and having everyone close ranks to support bills on the floor."

Other recent changes in Congressional rules help to spread power among more members. In this session of Congress, the House Democrats decreed that no member could hold more than one major sub-committee chairmanship (there was already a limit of one major chairmanship per person). The Senate Republicans on their part decided to limit each Senator to one ranking minority seat.

Senator Miller of Iowa is now the ranking minority member of the Ag Committee because both Senators Aiken and Young who are senior to him hold ranking minority positions on other committees. The power is being spread out a bit. Committee chairmen's power is still great but it is no longer absolute. Congress may be becoming more responsive to the rank and file of its membership.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, in their nationally syndicated column last month noted some new White House efforts to communicate with Congressmen and said they "take account of a relatively new phenomenon in today's House: It can no longer be dominated by a handful of powerful committee chairmen, by an all-powerful Speaker or by party loyalty."

Much of the farm legislation in past years has been made possible by the committee system; bills were drafted in the committee and then the Congress was asked to pass them under the sponsorship of the Congress' leadership and/or the President.

Debate was not encouraged, and neither were amendments from the floor. All of this is subject to change if the Congressional reform trend continues.

I believe the trend **will** continue, for several reasons. Not the least of these is the rapidly-growing "youth vote" that is coming in the next few years. Thirty-eight per cent of the U.S. population is now under 21, and these young people are going to want a

greater say in our governmental process. They are not likely to appreciate the frustrations of the seniority system.

The 18-year-old vote in Federal elections will speed the impact of this trend.

Another reason to call Congressional reorganization a trend is the increasing professionalism of the membership. A professional legislator, who depends on his effectiveness for re-election, has a strong incentive to make the system work for him.

Finally, the senior Congressmen and Senators who hold much of the seniority power are in their 60's, 70's, and even 80's. They have been the principal defenders of the seniority system, and as they die or retire, change may become easier.

I expect to see continued liberalization of Congressional procedures.

Conclusions

There are several trends in the Nation, in farming, and in the Congress that seem to point in one direction: It is going to get progressively more difficult for farmers and rural people to get their way in the Congress.

I do not look for sudden change.

Social trends often move very slowly, and the Congress of the United States has seldom been accused of moving too hastily.

As one political scientist put it, "Farmers have less power than they used to, but they have more than I thought they'd have at this point." Another observer noted, "The Farm Bloc may have been oversold before, and it may be undersold now."

However, it is difficult to add up the trends and see in the total anything but slowly diminishing **political** power for farm and rural people: The urban influence is growing stronger in the economy and in voter numbers. The trend is being amplified by the one-man-one-vote decisions and by the growing exurban movement that puts urban voters even into the rural districts. Farmer numbers are declining. Farmers are becoming less and less likely candidates for direct public assistance of the kinds they have received in the past.

In the Congress itself, the Establishment in which many rural legislators have been able to wield remarkable power has recently begun to weaken. The weakening is only slight so far. If it stopped now not much would have changed. But if the recent

changes are the beginning of a trend—then over the next few years the Congressional process may begin to function quite differently than it has in the recent past. Neither committees nor chairmen would be able to exert as much influence as they have, and farm legislation would be that much harder to pass.

Implications for Farmers, Rural People, and Agricultural Editors

The commercial farmer of tomorrow may have to depend more on his growing economic power and less on his political power. This may mean increased efforts to bargain collectively with buyers. It may mean forward contracts or vertical integration, or somewhat larger farming units than we have today (though a real takeover by large nonfarm corporations seems extremely unlikely).¹ At any rate, the farmer's traditional faith that political measures will bail him out of economic straits may be shaken in the future. It seems likely that commodity programs of the type we have known would get less support in the Congress of the future than they do today.

On the plus side, we may very well see more assistance for the real poor of the countryside than we have at present. It is no secret that most of the benefits of the present farm programs go to the bigger, more successful farmers. It also stands to reason that urban Congressmen have been reluctant to appropriate money for rural poverty and rural development when they were already funding a multi-billion dollar farm program.

We may already be seeing some of this trend. If the Family Assistance Plan were enacted today, it would be the first major piece of social legislation ever passed by the Congress that included farm and rural people on an equal basis with urban residents. Social security, unemployment compensation, minimum wage laws, and other landmarks of legislation left rural people out—often at the insistence of their own representatives.

One Washington farm organization official said, "Ironically, when you get to non-farm social issues that concern farmers, rural Congressmen have dragged their feet. . . . We don't always find that losing rural legislators hurts in getting farm legislation."

¹Two ag economists (Krousse and Kyle) presented a paper last year indicating that the 5,000-acre Corn Belt farm has a significant advantage over the 500-acre farm, mostly in purchasing and sales.

Another predicts, "As Congressional districts become more mixed and less rural, there will be less appeal in farm programs, and more appeal in programs that cut across the interests of the whole district . . . pollution abatement, rural development, food stamps, and stable food prices."

Indeed, rural development stands out as one of the obvious beneficiaries of the trends. Rural people look on it as a way to replace the declining agriculture in their economies. Urban people look on it as a way to re-distribute the population and relieve their congestion problems. Of course the Agriculture Committees in the past have not paid much attention to rural development, and little money was available for it.

Several strategies seem obvious for rural people in the future.

The first is to define achievable goals and focus on them. One Washington representative said, "Deep down, farmers want to be loved and admired. But the practical and achievable goal is to be compensated fairly and adequately for what they do."

The second strategy is to find allies to help win particular contests. On rural development, an appeal to the urban interest in relieving congestion may be appropriate. Agri-business is a natural ally on many issues—though an opponent on others. Farmers could ally themselves with export-minded businessmen to press for liberalized world trade in farm products.

One Washington farm group official talks of an alliance between rural people and urban residents to offset the power of the suburbs. Personally, I think temporary "marriages of convenience" are more likely than permanent alliances.

Another possible strategy is being developed by some dairy groups. They make campaign donations to urban Congressmen who have supported their position.

Role of the Agricultural Communicator

Agricultural communicators must and will continue to interpret rural problems and rural needs to national opinion and policy leaders. I think we've done this quite effectively over the years—as evident in the favorable opinion of farmers that urban people still generally voice in survey responses.

But perhaps the most important role that we can play at this point is in interpreting the national setting to our rural constituents. Farmers are frustrated. The strategies that have worked in

the past are not so effective today and will be even less so tomorrow. New techniques take time to learn, and even more time to be trusted. Rural people have probably not emotionally adjusted to being a less powerful minority group in our national councils.

If we can help farmers to assess their political and economic positions more clearly, then we will have helped them take a big step toward finding effective solutions to their problems. We cannot alter the population trends. We cannot stave off the powerful economic forces that are shaping agriculture and rural life today. But we can help farmers understand their position.

We must be careful. We must be sure we clearly understand these forces ourselves. Otherwise, we may do more harm than good.

One reaction I got from several interviews is summed up this way: "To harp on the same old themes of how well fed consumers are and how little money it costs them—they've heard that so often that boredom is the best reaction we can hope for. It probably engenders a lot of antagonism—especially since it usually comes from a group with an obvious vested interest."

Another danger was pointed out by Dr. Don Paarlberg in his book, *American Farm Policy*. He indicates that we have oversold farming as a way of life to farmers and farm people themselves. We have encouraged them to stay in farming even though the economic rewards were low. In doing so, we have compounded the farm problem.

But if we can assess the realities clearly, agricultural writers and editors have an important role to play and a large responsibility to accept in helping farmers to understand where they are, and the viable alternatives that lie before them.

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