Farm Crisis in Oklahoma, Part 2

*By Richard Lowitt**

Harvey Gardner, a farmer and rancher, devoted hours to championing the cause of American Agriculture by noting how closely beef production was tied to grain production. If the cattle price was fair, grain prices took a beating. If the reverse occurred and grain prices came close to parity, cattle prices plummeted. "In order for cattlemen to pay parity for grain, beef imports have got to come to a halt," Gardner insisted. With the number of beef cattle being raised in the United States at a low ebb, beef imports, Gardner claimed, comprised "the most severely overlooked aspect of the whole thing." The United States, as the largest beef producer in the world, was also the largest importer. To resolve this situation and others, Gardner, speaking for American Agriculture, called for greater input by farmers. Parity, Gardner explained, essentially meant "equality." Achieving it would release farmers from the handicap of being treated like "second-class citizens." While Gardner and others were bringing the message of American Agriculture to farmers and lawmakers in Washington, DC, budget estimates indicated that payment to farmers would decline from $7.3 billion in 1978 to $4.3 billion in 1979.[1]

While Oklahoma producers recognized they could not continue farming and ranching under current conditions and most endorsed the efforts of American Agriculture and its call for a farm strike, there were no mass plow-ups and other efforts to curb production and no violence. Complaints, pleas, and suggestions continued to pour into congressional offices, and increasingly irate farmers appeared on Capitol Hill, but nothing seriously changed. American Agriculture, however, continued to make headway among Oklahoma farmers, some of whom began to consider crop cutbacks. All became better informed about their plight and the significant role of agriculture in the functioning of the economy.[2]

Well aware that the American Agriculture Movement had aroused both public and congressional sympathy for the US farmer, US Senator Henry Bellmon wrote Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland, urging him to allow farmers greater flexibility in the set-aside program as a step toward balancing production and demand. Bellmon admired Bergland's insistence that available legislation provided sufficient vehicles to stimulate the agricultural economy. His suggestions were offered to help Bergland in this endeavor.[3]

When Bellmon wrote Bergland, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that nearly 5 percent of all US farmers were facing immediate bankruptcy. According to US Representative Glenn English, many of the younger farmers in Oklahoma who paid high prices and high interest rates for their land had lost so much money that many would be forced to abandon farming altogether. Since one-third of the gross national product came from the agricultural sector, English said the farm crisis jeopardized the entire economy. Meanwhile, the president of the Federal Land Bank of Wichita, Kansas, wondered "if for a few years farmers will have to accept a lower standard of living." National farm debt in 1960 was about $25 billion; in 1978 Representative English cited $180 billion, adding that in 1977 total farm debt rose at a rate of about $1.3 billion per month. And in Oklahoma, he observed, the debt against land was worth more than the land was worth in 1945.[4]

Seeking flexibility, Bellmon viewed the administration's announcement that farmers must remove cattle from wheat set-aside acreage as a further example "of President Carter's amazing lack of understanding of the present farm situation." Thus, while many members of Congress introduced measures seeking to do something about the farm situation and a handful of farm organizations were openly courting or working with the American Agricultural Movement, little understanding and no gleam of support emanated from the executive branch of government.[5]

Thus far the farm crisis was long on talk but devoid of any violence, despite calls for a farm strike. This situation changed in March 1978 when violence erupted in southern Texas. Six northwestern Oklahoma farmers were among more than two hundred strikers jailed in Edinburg. The wife of one was hospitalized for injuries inflicted by a police officer's billy club as she attempted to escape from a cloud of tear gas. Alberta Leierer, whose husband was jailed, asserted "we have just as much at stake in this farm strike as our husbands do. If they lose everything we lose everything." Three wives accompanied their husbands to Texas; only Leierer was assaulted, but another wife was briefly jailed. All who went to Edinburg were American Agriculture Movement members. And it was reported that two cars of movement members were en route to Texas. Oklahoma members were joined by farmers from Louisiana, Missouri, Kentucky, and Georgia, all of whom along with Texans sought to prevent Mexican farmers from bringing their produce across the Rio Grande. Strike leaders estimated that twenty-five to thirty-five Oklahoma farmers were in jail. They insisted that the fines leveled against them be dropped before they left the Edinburg jail, secure in the knowledge that their cause would receive widespread attention in distressed rural regions.[6]

In one sector of Oklahoma agriculture, however, there was marked improvement. Cattle numbers in 1978 were generally below earlier estimates. As cattle numbers dropped, value per head steadily increased. An inventory showed 2.3 million cattle in Oklahoma on January 1, 1978, a 3 percent decrease from a year earlier. Inventory value of all cattle and calves on Oklahoma's seventy-one thousand cattle operations showed a 23 percent increase over the previous year's value. The substantial reduction in cattle numbers meant a much-improved market. While cattlemen's difficulties were far from over, by reducing their herds they were in the process of resolving them. But there was no end in sight to the depressing conditions their neighboring grain farmers were enduring.[7]

Although many in Congress now agreed on the necessity of farm aid, there was an inability on the part of its proponents to agree on a specific measure, and no president showed any inclination to endorse congressional proposals. In 1978 the Senate managed to cobble together

Combine harvesting wheat on a channel-type terrace on the M. A. Davis farm (20778. AG.SCS.OKLA.8186, Edd Roberts Collection, OHS Research Division).

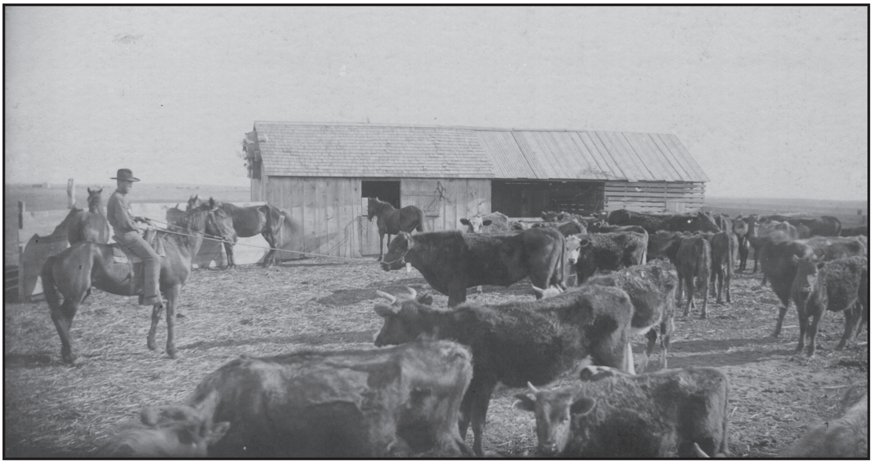
a farm bill that dealt with crucial aspects of the farm problem, and after listening patiently to twenty-one agricultural leaders in the White House, President Jimmy Carter indicated he understood the broad dimensions of the situation. Yet, despite these endeavors, no agreement could be reached.[8]

Just how wheat farmers in Oklahoma were coping was vividly portrayed in a penetrating story in the feature magazine of the *Tulsa Tribune*. Ralph Marsh related the predicament of several farmers in Kingfisher County along with the views of the banker who handled their accounts. The cost-price situation affected them all, along with Soviet Union grain deals and beef imports that depressed cattle prices. Marsh related how the local banker viewed the situation that had younger farmers among the hardest hit. On other farms the wife went to work off the farm, and some of his clients worked as roughnecks on an oil rig and expanded into the hog business. To keep afloat some farmers refinanced their farms using higher land evaluation to borrow more money and at the same time faced the specter of losing the land. Overall, the banker concluded the young progressive farmer was trapped by interest on money he borrowed to purchase machinery to work the land. At the other end of the spectrum the old, established farmer was borrowing against the land his father gave him. If a farmer expanded operations, he ran up his interest money; cutting back drove up production costs per acre. The goal of farmers to keep their land and to maintain their way of life was at stake. And the country banker, who provided access to credit and who at times had to foreclose, was both a keen observer and a key player. He also was vulnerable if he overextended his operations and was unable to collect interest on them.[9]

To resolve the crisis, it was clear to all concerned that the impetus would have to come from Washington, DC. After meeting with a delegation of Oklahoma Panhandle members of American Agriculture, a member of US Representative Tom Steed's staff informed him that they were most concerned about the flexible supports principle. If that concept could be achieved, they could live with any bill Congress approved. Flexibility was a premise stridently called for by Bellmon as a tool in bringing supply and demand into balance. Like most Oklahoma farmers, especially leaders of farm organizations, Bellmon argued against proposals that made food producers dependent on subsidies for their income, concluding that they were much better off when they could get fair prices in the market place. All the efforts to start resolving the crisis came to an abrupt end in 1978 when President Carter vetoed the Emergency Farm Bill.[10]

The failure to achieve remedial legislation led the American Agriculture Movement to increase its efforts in calling for 100 percent of parity at the market place. Now, however, some movement members characterized opponents as part of a vast conspiracy. "I am convinced," wrote a member from Amber, Oklahoma, "that the Carter Administration and their promoters are only interested in controlling food, energy, and the money or wealth of this nation in order to establish world government" controlled by multinational corporations and banks. Congress now had to do more than seek 100 percent parity; it now had to pass laws "to prevent communism and socialism taking over our democracy." While desperate residents in rural Oklahoma out of utter frustration found a simple answer that could explain the failure to secure salutary legislation, there is no evidence to suggest the American Agricultural Movement endorsed such views.[11]

Recognizing that significant assistance would not be forthcoming from Washington, DC, producers sought different ways to survive. While one hundred million bushels of wheat moved out of Oklahoma each year into the export market, farmers were reducing acreage formerly devoted to wheat and were showing an interest in other commodities, particularly alfalfa. Other farmers harvested their wheat despite the fact that grain prices remained below production costs. Although cattle offered a way out, securing cattle was



William Van Bushkirk roping cattle at his home near Manchester, Oklahoma Territory, c. 1896 (18849, Laurence Paddock Collection, OHS Research Division).

a problem since their numbers, as already noted, had been greatly reduced. In the Oklahoma Panhandle some farmers plowed under wheat; others were fencing wheat fields for cattle grazing. Further indications of a shift in outlook were evident when an American Agriculture spokesperson in Oklahoma claimed that the movement was seeking to reduce wheat production in the state.[12]

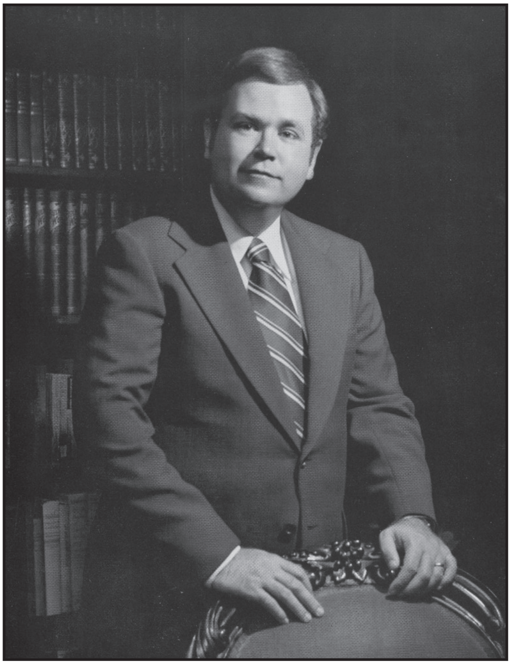
A sign of improved conditions for cattlemen was a story in the *New York Times* entitled "Wholesale Prices For Beef Set Record." And even more positive was a story in the *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman* reporting that the wheat outlook was improving, thanks to a substantial drop in production and the fact that the People's Republic of China purchased one million metric tons in April 1978. On a visit to Oklahoma a USDA official predicted increased progress in developing markets for US wheat overseas.[13]

Despite encouraging signs Bellmon was far from satisfied. He observed that farm real estate debt had risen to more than $15 billion and that Oklahoma farmers were facing bankruptcies at four to five times the normal rate in the high plains region. On his own farm he acknowledged that he had lost money for the previous three years and that few young farmers could survive such losses. He blamed the policies pursued by every administration since he entered the Senate in 1968 for the intolerable markets farmers faced. Because no one farmer or group of farmers could have an appreciable effect, leadership from the Carter administration was necessary "to bring supply and demand into balance and strengthen farm prices." Unfortunately such leadership was lacking. While Bellmon did not want Congress "to get into the business of administering programs, but because of lack of action by the Administration," he concluded, "we have no choice." But his proposal indicated that Congress had too many choices and could not muster enough support to confront the administration.[14]

To add to producers woes, grain shipments to the Soviet Union were suspended by the president early in 1980. The embargo drastically upset the market even though the administration pledged to purchase grain already under contract. Carter initiated the embargo following the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops in December 1979. Fraught with political implications, the embargo imposed just prior to the Iowa caucuses primarily impacted corn belt farmers. Less affected Oklahoma wheat producers, nevertheless, were concerned that farmers could not bear an unfair share of the burden.[15]

With the number of family farms declining and with an embargo on Soviet grain sales in place, Bellmon pointed to an estimate of the World Food Council that within the next fifteen years the demand for food grains worldwide would increase by some 550 million tons and that US farmers would be called upon to provide the largest share. This estimate served to further his concern that legislation be enacted to assist family farmers. Though Congress discussed numerous measures, little was accomplished in 1980. Indeed, the *National Journal* in a feature article reported that the grain embargo had no serious effect on either the Soviets or the farmers. As the nation prepared for a presidential election, significant agricultural legislation no longer seemed possible, though there was speculation that the Carter administration would take some action to bolster support in the farm belt. On the other hand Bellmon, who had worked tirelessly on behalf of his rural constituents, decided to retire to his farm in Billings, Oklahoma. Congress did produce one piece of agricultural legislation that was important but not central to the squeeze crippling and crushing many grain farmers. Legislation was enacted creating a Food Security Reserve of four million metric tons of wheat to help alleviate famine in what was then called the Third World.[16]

The new Congress quickly got to work on a farm bill. Oklahoma's new US senator, David L. Boren, had endorsed while governor the platform of the American Agriculture Movement and had supported the farm strike. In the Senate he offered an amendment to prohibit the importation of Soviet agricultural products as long as the grain embargo continued. While the Senate approved his proposal, the amendment was changed to reflect only "a Sense of the Senate" and thus lost its mandatory impact. Boren found it incredible that "the



David L. Boren in a photograph for Oklahoma Today *magazine (13435.B, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS Research Division).*

U.S. government, on the one hand, denies our farmers access to the Soviet market, while on the other hand we keep our markets open to the Soviets." In addition, he sought fair income levels rather than more credit in an economy where total farm debt was ten times the level of net farm income. While Boren had fears of an impending collapse of major sectors of the farm economy, the Ronald Reagan administration viewed larger farms and a growing dependence on exports as a situation requiring less federal aid. Such an approach tied together both the Reagan administration's "free market" rhetoric and its budget constraints.[17]

The farm bill that made its way through Congress approved wheat support prices of $4.20 per bushel by the House of Representatives and $4.00 per bushel by the Senate, the closest target prices came to the $5.00 level that grain farmers deemed their cost of production. But what rankled Oklahomans and did not bode well for the farm bill was the president's refusal to meet with a group of congressmen to discuss the sagging farm economy. High interest rates, huge commodity surpluses, soaring production costs, and depressed market prices accelerated large-scale delinquencies in government loan programs. This situation led Boren to introduce a measure calling for a one-year moratorium on foreclosures of farm loans by the Farmers Home Administration (FHA).[18]

It also led Bellmon to offer the Senate Budget Committee a firsthand report "from down on the farm." Having established himself during his tenure "as a budgeter of the old school," he now presented his credentials as a farmer who was losing money on his wheat and cattle. He discussed how rising land values led hard-pressed producers to borrow against their land to cover operating deficits, just like the federal government. But in Bellmon's case his land bank manager informed him that this was the last time he could borrow against his land. If farmers could not meet interest payments on their land, Bellmon indicated, "many farms would have to be sold over the next 12 to 18 months." A glut of such sales would cause land prices to fall, further reducing farmers' equity and leading to "even more liquidation, a snowballing effect." To stall this collapse, Bellmon called for prompt action by the FHA and other agencies to lower interest rates. He asserted that he did not want to "whine and complain" but rather inform members "how it is down on the farm" and to say "straight out" that two more years like the previous two "and the U.S. will no longer be the bread basket of the world." He concluded his analysis by criticizing the Reagan administration, stating that high interest rates were "killing agriculture" and that supply-side economics "has meant less for the tax collector and more, much more, for the money lenders." The idea of stimulating an economic recovery by reducing deficits and increasing revenues in the depth of a recession appeared to Bellmon "an unproven radical economic theory."[19]

Both Boren and Bellmon expressed anxiety about the impending crisis in farm credit that threatened increasing numbers of producers with bankruptcy, foreclosure, and even the collapse of the farm economy. During the 1970s the Farm Credit System (FCS), the nation's leading supplier of agricultural credit, had been especially rapid in funneling large amounts of money into agriculture. The FCS comprised three types of lending institutions: 1) federal land banks and the federal land bank associations, 2) the federal intermediate credit banks and the production credit associations, and 3) the banks for cooperatives. Overall supervision was provided by the Farm Credit Administration, an independent agency in the executive branch. With growing demands for credit, the FCS in 1980 was sorely pressed. As debate over the proposed Farm Crisis Act became more intense and with farm income at its lowest point since the Great Depression, farm credit crept into the debate with pleas for shoring the sagging agricultural economy. Boren warned that without immediate action excess supplies of wheat and corn would combine to have an adverse effect on market conditions.[20]

He was successful in securing an amendment requiring the secretary of agriculture to permit deferral of payments for FHA loans to creditors temporarily unable to make payments through no fault of their own. It took Boren seven months to achieve this goal. He was disturbed that the administration had not used its authority to ease the farm credit situation, noting that from October 1, 1981, to August 31, 1982, there were 776 foreclosures, 5,501 voluntary liquidations, and 1,156 bankruptcies compared to 300 foreclosures in 1981. And he was more disturbed by a recent study demonstrating that Oklahoma farm incomes tended to decline faster and more drastically than farm incomes in the United States.[21]

With the failure of his amendment to achieve fruition in legislation, Boren tried again incorporating it into the Emergency Agricultural Credit Act of 1983, which he cosponsored. He observed that "in Oklahoma, the average net farm income in 1981 was only $14 per farm, the lowest in the entire nation." In 1982 he maintained "that figure will register in the red." Since the president in his State of the Union message stated that he was directing the USDA to work with farmers directly to help them stay in business, Boren believed the measure he cosponsored would allow the USDA to do what Reagan requested.[22]

He went one step further and introduced a comprehensive farm bill stating that "unless we take drastic action now, it does not appear the situation will be reversed." What concerned Boren was the estimate that about two thousand FHA borrowers in Oklahoma would not have financing unless additional funds became available. He called upon the secretary of agriculture to reallocate funds to meet these needs because enacting a supplemental appropriation bill would be time consuming when swift action was necessary. What made the situation most precarious in Oklahoma was the sagging demand for natural gas and the "shutting in" of many gas wells causing "a staggering increase in the number of bankruptcies among independent oil men and their support industries." Adding to this crisis was the failure in 1982 of the Penn Square Bank in Oklahoma City. The confluence of these failures left the economy in shambles.[23]

The Farm Credit Bank of Wichita, Kansas, a major source of credit for farmers, ranchers, and cooperative agribusiness, whose district included Oklahoma, reported "net farm income remains depressed for the fourth consecutive year, and we see little chance for near-term improvement." Severely hot, dry weather compounded the problem for some producers; in many instances their financial position had eroded

Terraces on the E. L. Popchoke farm in Choctaw County. Photo by G. W. Thomas, February 1943 (20778.AG.SCS.OKLA.8503, Edd Roberts Collection, OHS Research Division).

to the point that the banks could not survive an additional debt load, while the borrower might "be well advised to liquidate some land."

Owing to these difficult conditions, ranchers and farmers reduced their demand for products and services. Resolving the problems confronting producers hinged on increased export demand to reduce supplies of many commodities. In addition, the report concluded, a general improvement of the domestic economy plus individual attention to reducing heavy debt loads would help meliorate the situation. One positive action in Oklahoma was the successful effort of the Oklahoma Wheat Commission members, meeting in Enid with officials of the People's Republic of China, in convincing the foreign dignitaries of the virtues of Hard Red Winter Wheat. The visit resulted in the sale of 4.5 million bushels.[24]

Despite the coup of the grain sales, the outlook in Oklahoma remained bleak. The Tenth Federal Reserve District, which included Oklahoma, reported that loan repayment rates dropped sharply across the farm belt. In the district the population of farmers who left farming during the fourth quarter of 1982 and the first quarter of 1983 was about "65 per cent higher than bankers considered normal." And, as would be expected, loan delinquencies were rising as well. A point when further extending credit no longer would be in the best interest of the borrower was becoming evident.[25]

A comparable situation prevailed within the FCS itself. For example, loan losses in the Production Credit Association for the previous three years exceeded the combined losses for the preceding seventeen years. The estimated $240 to $250 million in losses sustained by this association represented in one year approximately 40 percent of all losses throughout its fifty-year existence as part of the FCS. The institutions comprising the system were urged to stay with troubled borrowers as long as they had any prospect for recovery. Nevertheless, the governor of the system expected refinancing, repayment, and loan servicing problems to increase. By spring 1984, as this situation was becoming increasingly evident, "one of the most perplexing, frustrating and enduring problems of the farm debt crisis was the seeming indifference with which official Washington approached the problem," a problem that both Bellmon and Boren had called to the attention of the Reagan administration, which claimed it had a handle on the situation. If the administration did not ignore proposals coming out of Congress, it did not endorse any seeking to cope with the mounting debt crisis. It did, however, seek to improve trade relations. In this area Oklahoma wheat producers, as previously noted, benefited. Not so, however, for cattlemen. In 1984 Oklahoma had more beef animals per square mile than any other state in the nation. And with prevailing low cattle prices, beef cattle production, the biggest agricultural industry in the state, again faced bleak prospects.[26]

In 1984 while endorsing Reagan's reelection, Oklahoma voters recognizing Boren's continuous efforts on their behalf overwhelmingly reelected him. He carried all but 5 of the state's 2,354 precincts. Humbling though this victory was to Boren, it also put increasing pressure on him to prod an indifferent Reagan administration to meet the crisis head on. According to press reports, by summer 1985 the administration was shifting its thinking on agricultural issues, searching for a new approach to the increasing problems of farmers and their bankers. Boren, no doubt, prompted the administration to consider changing its approach, when in February he dramatically brought the farm crisis to national attention and in so doing projected himself to the forefront in garnering public attention.[27]

Soon after returning to Washington, DC, following his reelection, Boren announced that he would begin a vigil consisting of a daily Senate speech calling attention to the "massive economic crisis in agriculture." His purpose was to initiate spade work for a new farm bill. In sending forth the name of Edwin Meese to be his attorney general, President Reagan helped transform the vigil into a filibuster. While neither Boren nor the handful of senators from both parties who agreed with him opposed

Meese, they intended to stall the vote until the administration took notice of the crisis overwhelming the US heartland. Their remarks now received increased attention. Most media coverage focused on Boren, who led the group seeking emergency credit legislation.

While Boren sought action by the Reagan administration, the filibuster drew irate comments from the president, the secretary of agriculture, and Senator Robert Dole, chairman of the Agriculture Committee. An emergency farm credit package negotiated with Republicans by Boren and J. James Exon of Nebraska was rejected by their Democratic colleagues after more than two hours of closed-door discussion. Failure meant the filibuster would continue while William French Smith, who wanted to retire, remained attorney general until Meese, a close friend and ally of the president, could gain Senate approval. Finally, on February 23, 1984, after four days of delaying tactics, the filibuster ended, paving the way for Meese's confirmation. The compromise, negotiated after acrimonious floor debate, allowed both sides to add farm aid amendments to an Ethiopian famine relief bill.[28]

Boren, the chief agitator of the filibuster and of the compromise "seemed the most relieved player in the game." He claimed the filibuster forced the Reagan administration to make "significant improvements in farm programs," but he offered no specifics. A Republican colleague offered his own evaluation: "David Boren did a great thing in getting the farm credit crisis on the front burner, but the fire got a little hot." Nevertheless, Boren came out of the filibuster with enhanced prestige and the respect of his colleagues, plus a lot of newspaper coverage and television time.[29]

In the House of Representatives Glenn English and Wes Watkins got closer to the heart of the matter, calling upon the president to fire Budget Director David Stockman and Agriculture Secretary John Block for fostering austere legislation they claimed would eliminate the US family farm. Stockman was quoted as saying that there was an "overinvestment" in agriculture and that some farmers must get out of the business to achieve a market-oriented production system not dependent on price supports. In response English noted that already up to three hundred thousand farmers in the past three to four years had been wiped out and that problems such as shrinking foreign markets were not the farmers' doing. Further, his colleague Mike Synar noted that regardless of what Congress did, farmers would go out of business at a rate unprecedented since the Great Depression. Most would file for bankruptcy in an attempt to reorganize their debt and keep their land. Changes in the bankruptcy code, Synar argued, would allow them to

Pasture on the Wesley Noble Farm in Guthrie, Oklahoma, June 20, 1941. Photo by E. W. Jenkins (20778.AG.SCS.OKLA.5706.B, Edd Roberts Collection, OHS Research Division).

reorganize their debts and keep their land, a change the Reagan administration was not yet willing to consider.[30]

Following the approval of Meese's nomination, Boren played an active role in crafting emergency farm credit legislation. He was outraged when the president vetoed the measure. Reagan had asked Congress to spend $20 billion on foreign aid, while turning down $100 to $200 million to assist farmers in coping with the economic collapse of agriculture. To explain the filibuster, his role, and what he sought to accomplish, Boren, in a lengthy letter published in the *Daily Oklahoman*, surveyed the dimensions of the situation, noting the meager concessions the filibuster achieved as an indication of the administration's indifference to the concerns of Oklahoma farmers.[31]

While official Washington, DC, dickered and debated, a USDA report acknowledged that ninety-three thousand midsized farms, holding $47 billion in debt, were technically insolvent or on the verge of going broke, an increase of 45 percent over earlier figures. In many ways 1985 marked the height of the farm crisis. It was the year hotlines appeared, support groups were organized, and stress counseling got under way. It was also the year in which lenders generally realized that many loans were not going to be repaid as farmers missed interest and principal payment deadlines. In Oklahoma the bank commissioner listed the number of failed banks in his annual report: six in 1984; nine in 1985; sixteen in 1986; and twenty in 1987. In 1988 an additional sixteen banks failed, "however, total assets were reduced only slightly due to improved economic conditions, ..." Though sixteen more banks were closed in 1989, five new charters were granted, and twenty-seven branch banks were given approval to purchase the failed banks' assets and assume the deposit liability.[32]

Hotlines were functioning in Oklahoma and at least ten other states to help offset the impact of these failures by February 1985. Funded through churches, rural advocacy groups, contributions, and even with public money, the lines were part of a network informing farmers where they could turn for help—or find if there was any hope of help. Besides offering a voice over the phone, some staff members made "house calls" to counsel desperate farmers whose notes were coming due. As rural banks tightened their access to credit, even solvent farmers would fail. And the trauma of losing a farm that had been in a family for generations had devastating consequences: estranged children, marital breakup, alcoholism, physical abuse, depression, and at times suicide.[33]

In the first half of 1985 a total of 178 Oklahoma farmers in fifty-three counties lost their farms in foreclosures by the Federal Land Bank. While debt was at the essence of the crisis, concern about income was central to the outlook of producers. Prices received by farmers in 1985 were 20 to 25 percent lower than the previous year and were predicted to continue falling. A report by agricultural economists at Oklahoma State University observed that one of every five farmers in the state was deep enough in debt to face financial failure.[34]

A study by an Oklahoma Conference of Churches task force resulted in a plea for churches to get involved with the state's farm and ranch families facing significant changes in their way of life. Dr. Max E. Glenn, the conference executive officer, expressed a "concern for thousands of persons who are suffering loss of income, loss of credit, humiliating loss of self-confidence, and even loss of ownership of the family farm." The conference report called for "understanding, compassion, justice and action" in addressing the situation in rural Oklahoma where their study showed that more than 50 percent of the value of non-real estate productive farm assets was owed to creditors.[35]

The interfaith task force, after reviewing the situation, recommended community-based farm crisis forums to plan local action, creation of an aid packet providing a listing of resources and agencies, and other items that could be of assistance. Glenn noted that the task force would develop a statewide network of individuals who would volunteer their expertise. This report marked the introduction of the faith community into the crisis, offering care and counseling for people in distress. Along with these efforts, there was widespread understanding that if the crisis would be abated, positive action from Washington, DC, was necessary. And thus far, despite valiant efforts by the Oklahoma congressional delegation, the intensity of the crisis only increased.[36]

Though the filibuster failed to bring significant change, Boren increased his efforts by announcing that the Senate Agriculture Committee, of which he was a member, had approved his amendment to extend the FHA loan program. He also wrote the secretary of agriculture expressing concern about declining agricultural exports and complaining that "we are rapidly losing our export markets." Then, several days later, he announced that he would hold hearings in Oklahoma City on the financial crisis in the FCS. Officials of the system recently had called for federal help. Boren hoped the problem could be addressed by raising farm income that thereby would enable farmers to meet their obligations at FCS and at commercial banks. The 1985 Farm Bill, with Boren's amendment and concerns reflected in it, required Reagan's approval to become law. And that was the problem.[37]

Earlier a panel of agricultural economists blasted a proposal suggested by the president to wean agriculture from its dependence on subsidies. Even worse, as far as farmers were concerned, were Reagan's remarks at the annual dinner of the Gridiron Club, sponsored by members of the Washington, DC, press corps and attended by top government figures. Speaking supposedly off the record Reagan quipped, "I think we should keep the grain and export the farmers." There were groans in the audience. Then at breakfast with reporters the following Monday, Reagan was asked if in retrospect he regretted the remark. His reply: "Yes, because it didn't get a laugh," words that were given wide circulation and indicated the high hurdle that Boren and his colleagues faced in securing his support for the Farm Bill.[38]

Despite the roadblock posed by the Reagan administration, Boren continued to speak out and sponsor amendments before Congress shut down for a five-week summer break. Later in the year he accepted an invitation from Prince Philip of Great Britain to participate in a conference on World Agricultural Problems at Windsor Castle where he informed leaders of British agriculture that US farmers could no longer afford to bear the cost of a stable world agricultural policy by themselves.[39]

In Oklahoma some farmers began to denounce the president's failure to address the economic problems facing family farms. In addition, at year's end the Oklahoma Conference of Churches was busily recruiting more people to man the hotline and to counsel farmers. One attorney told Dr. Glenn, the conference executive officer, that half the farmers coming to him for bankruptcy "wind up in divorce." In contrast Willie Nelson assisted Oklahoma farmers with $40,000 from his second Farm Aid Concert. Checks totaling $15,000 were for food; the remaining $25,000 was to be used for the hotline.[40]

While Nelson's gift helped some Oklahoma farmers, Boren cosponsored an amendment in the Senate to bail out the FCS. The amendment was incorporated into a rescue package that centralized the system's loosely linked finances, tightened federal regulations, and offered standby financial help. But when the 1985 Farm Bill emerged from the Conference Committee, Boren was no longer optimistic, stating "overall, the bill fails to adequately address the income problems of farmers or to provide an aggressive program to increase exports." Its passage would do very little to reduce the crisis in rural America. His unstinting efforts came to naught in the final version of the bill.[41]

Early in the new year Boren again cosponsored a measure providing comprehensive farm credit legislation aimed at stopping farm loan foreclosures. It would specifically require the FCS, which held about one-third of the nation's farm loans, to lower interest rates on restructured debt, thereby avoiding farm loan foreclosures. The bill also allowed farmers to write off up to 30 percent of the principal of an agricultural loan over a ten year period and receive federally generated certificates to prevent sudden capital drains. With a new secretary of agriculture, with the departure of Budget Director David Stockman, and with Reagan devoting his energies primarily to confronting "the Evil Empire" and ending the Cold War, Boren had reason for some optimism that the federal government could change its outlook and consider the farm crisis.[42]

Optimism manifested itself in the increasing number of press releases flowing from Boren's office delineating whirlwind activities on behalf of embattled farmers, including restructuring farm debt, having the Commodity Credit Corporation advance funds to eligible farmers, and implementing a "buy down" program offered by the FHA. In April Boren announced the FHA would receive an additional $2.5 million for direct operating loans. At the same time Oklahoma clergymen were becoming better informed and aware that the crisis was a moral one with spiritual and religious overtones as well. Clergymen and rural bankers could both provide counsel and assistance to individuals, while their delegates in Washington, DC, strove mightily to secure legislation from an administration becoming less rigid in its outlook.[43]

It was the increasing number of rural bank failures throughout the heartland along with the collapse of major banks in some of its cities that attracted national attention. In the first four months of 1986 the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation reported 37 bank failures. During 1985 it reported a total of 120 bank failures. In Oklahoma major banks in Tulsa, Enid, and Oklahoma City failed or were seriously impaired because falling oil prices wrought further havoc on the failing economy.

Nevertheless, there were definite signs that the times were changing. The FCS initiated loan restructuring policies and a more competitive method of pricing interest. The president of Professional Farmers of America told seven hundred wheat farmers in Enid that "the fabric has changed from negative to positive" and that farmers with "the deepest problems have work-out plans." In addition, the legal coordinator for the Family Farm Defense Fund told the farmers in Enid that their organization would provide full support to assist Oklahoma farmers being foreclosed on by private corporations or federal agencies. Their work was facilitated by a measure enacted by the Oklahoma state legislature placing a one-year moratorium on any Federal Land Bank Association seeking foreclosure action in a state court. By spring 1986 the nadir had been reached. T. S. Eliot called April the cruelest month, but in Oklahoma it marked the beginning of the end of the farm crisis.[44]

But it was far from over. Before leaving for Austin, Texas, to attend Willie Nelson's second Farm Aid Concert, Dr. Glenn of the Oklahoma Council for Churches observed that, according to projections, "25 percent of 17,500 farm and ranch families will lose their farms and ranches in the next 12 to 15 months." More disturbing were the kinds of calls received on the hotlines ranging from financial distress to contemplation of suicide. He cited eight suicides directly related to the farm crisis and mentioned other "accidents" that could not be authenticated. What the Reagan administration called "the realignment of rural areas and the rural economy," some in Oklahoma called genocide. In Austin he hoped to secure funds to replenish their empty coffers and be of assistance to beleaguered farm families.[45]

In Washington, DC, Boren, along with his farm-state colleagues, did not let up in their efforts to keep farmers in business by restructuring their debt and by providing advance deficiency payments for crops. They were pleased when the administration sought a major grain sale to the Soviets. While these legislators were supporting measures to

Left to right: Henry Bellmon, Oklahoma Dairy Princess, President Richard Nixon, Dewey Bartlett (19413.85.74.159, Cherokee Strip Museum Collection, OHS Research Division).

save the family farm, eighty Oklahoma farmers attended the National Farm Congress at Saint Louis. The congress, an offshoot of the Willie Nelson Farm Aid Concert efforts, discussed proposals for legislation that would do what Boren and his associates also sought to do, namely stop the downward slide of the farm family.[46]

Despite a difficult year by its end, signs mounted that the long, painful recession was bottoming out and that the downward slide was beginning to abate. Most encouraging was an evident slowdown in the decline of farmland values. Significant pieces of legislation played a key role. Changes in bankruptcy legislation called for enforced debt restructuring throughout rural America, while amendments to the Farm Credit Act bolstered the ailing FCS and the Food Security Act of 1985 reduced loan rates to assist farmers in becoming more competitive internationally. A year-end survey in the *Economic Review* was entitled "U.S. Agriculture on the Mend." In Oklahoma, with its wave of bank failures and its high rate of delinquency on agricultural loans, farm communities continued to suffer as the farm structure slowly started to stabilize with fewer family farms in foreclosure than in previous years. And by spring 1987 prospects for recovery were evident as crop prices improved, inflation fears abated, and there was renewed Soviet interest in purchasing grain. A decline in the value of the dollar against other currencies contributed to a modest rise in the volume of farm exports.[47]

The hotlines continued to ring in 1987 with tales of foreclosures, bankruptcies, and suicides, but they were considerably fewer. While Willie Nelson's Farm Aid organization had distributed almost $6.5 million to various crisis groups throughout rural America, the heartland was on the mend. Recovery was evident by virtue of record farm earnings, shared across crop and livestock operations, along with a stabilizing farmland market. As the farm financial crisis faded, agriculture's long-awaited recovery was becoming abundantly evident.[48]

What conclusions or observations can be offered about the farm crisis that engulfed Oklahoma for about two decades? To begin, it was the policies pursued by the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidencies that caused and determined the dimensions of the crisis. The hazards imposed by nature that farmers and ranchers encountered were not central to the crisis. And it was only the collapse of the FCS and the failures of increasing numbers of rural banks that allowed David Boren, the right person in the right place at the right time, to forcefully bring the crisis to the forefront of public attention. The other factor was a shift in the outlook of the Reagan administration. In Reagan's second term John Block and David Stockman, both hostile to rural concerns, were no longer in government service, and Reagan himself was heavily involved in foreign policy matters and seeking an end to the Cold War. But it should be emphasized that it was financial collapse, and not agricultural distress, that brought about changes that resolved the crisis.

If the collapse of the credit structure in rural regions was central to ending the crisis, what then brought it on? Here we must return to developments launched in the Nixon years. The decision to conduct the war in Vietnam without raising taxes, a policy that became a trademark of the conservative era that followed, brought with it slowly mounting inflation. In addition, the Nixon administration, casting aside the New Deal outlook of seeking to keep supply and demand in balance, went all out in urging full-scale agricultural production. Since the bulk of Oklahoma grain and beef was consumed abroad, Oklahoma producers, in competition with producers elsewhere, found they were not competing on an even playing field. And as prices increased for the cost of everything necessary to continue operating, they soon found themselves in an ever-tightening cost-price freeze. To continue functioning and making ends meet, more and more producers borrowed money using segments of their farm as security. Little meaningful was accomplished to resolve this situation until the banks failed. Oklahoma producers and their legislators could not muster enough support in an increasingly urban and corporate nation to hold on and pursue a meaningful way of life until the rural banking structure broke down.

Today there are few in Oklahoma who remember the farm crisis, but there are many who venerate President Ronald Reagan as a leading figure of the conservative era that flowered during the years of the farm crisis.

Endnotes

* Richard Lowitt is a retired professor of history at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. Dr. Lowitt currently resides in Concord, Massachusetts.

[1] *Dewey (OK) City Record*, January 26, 1978, box 63, folder 17, Dewey Bartlett Collection, Clipping Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as DBC, CS, CACCA); *National Journal*, January 28, 1978, 162. See also Lloyd Goodwin and C. W. Hathaway to Tom Steed, January 30, 1978, box 90, folder 1, Tom Steed Collection, Legislative Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as TSC, LS, CACCA). Gardner and Hathaway of the Cherokee Hills Resource Conservation and Development Project called for halting the importation of all beef, live and frozen, until cattle prices reached parity.

[2] See for example the flyer prepared by the farmers of the American Agricultural Movement of Duke, Oklahoma, and the story "Farmers Plan Strike," *Frederick (OK) Press*, February 2, 1978. Both items are in box 90, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA, and include an official policy statement of the American Agriculture Movement.

[3] Henry Bellmon to Bob Bergland, February 23, 1978, box 4, folder 2, Allan Cromley Collection, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (herafter cited as ACC, CACCA). Measures to provide greater flexibility were introduced in Congress by Keith Sebelius and Jack Hightower. See Keith Sebelius to Dear Colleague, February 13, 1978, and Jack Hightower to Dear Colleague, February 14, 1978, both items are in box 90, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[4] Glenn English, "A Report to the People of the Sixth District," in *Plain English by Glenn English*, newsletter, week of February 8, 1978, box 9, folder 4, ACC, CACCA; "Farmers to Mark Time Awhile," *Oklahoma Journal* (Oklahoma City), February 12, 1978, box 90, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[5] News: US Sen. Henry Bellmon, March 1, 1978, press release, box 4, file 2, ACC, CACCA; *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, March 1978, 3.

[6] *Enid (OK) Morning News*, March 3, 1978; *Ponca City (OK) News*, March 2, 1978; *Enid (OK) Daily Eagle*, March 3, 1978; *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), March 3, 1978.

[7] *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, March 1978, 11.

[8] *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 1978, includes James P. Gannon review of the situation in Congress, box 4, folder 2, ACC, CACCA; *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, April 1978, 11, includes discussion of President Jimmy Carter's views.

[9] Ralph Marsh, "Oklahoma's wheat farmers just trying to hold on," *Tulsa (OK) Tribune*, March 29, 1978, box 9, folder 10, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[10] Memo: tr to Steed, April 4, 1978, box 90, folder 2, TSC, LS, CACCA; News: US Sen. Henry Bellmon, April 10, 1978, press release, box 4, folder 2, ACC, CACCA; *Enid Morning News*, April 12, 1978, and *Kiowa City Star*, April 13, 1978, both preceding newspaper items are found in box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA. The *Kiowa Star* story related the favorable response of farmers to the Farm Bill. And the Duke American Agriculture Movement to Steed, April 17, 1978, expressed the pride of its members in the support the measure received from the congressional delegation.

[11] Carol Woods to Dear Sir, April 25, 1978, box 90, folder 2, TSC, LS, CACCA. At the

same time President Carter signed into law far-reaching farm credit legislation enabling farmers to refinance debts incurred during the years of low farm prices. See undated story in box 9, folder 5, ACC, CACCA.

[12] *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, May 1978, 6, 7, 28; Story by David Egner, *Muskogee (OK) Phoenix*, May 7, 1978, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA.

[13] *New York Times*, May 21, 1978, 25, box 46, folder 2, DBC, CACCA; See *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman,* June 1978, 15, and July 1978, 20, for stories about the improving wheat outlook. The *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, September 1978, 5, offered a positive outlook for both cattle and wheat.

[14] Henry Bellmon statement to Mr. President, n.d., box 4, folder 5, ACC, CACCA. Bellmon did not give up. During the congressional recess he travelled to the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and to Switzerland to discuss ways of improving the foreign market for US grain. He also went to Canada to work out an agreement that would put a floor under the price of wheat sold for export from both countries. See News: US Sen. Henry Bellmon, October 13, 1978, press release, and Henry Bellmon to Bob Bergland, November 1, 1978, both preceding items found in box 4, folder 5, ACC, CACCA. In December Bellmon announced that the People's Republic of China would purchase at least twenty-one million tons of grain from the United States over a four-year period. See News: US Sen. Henry Bellmon, December 7, 1978, press release, box 4, folder 5, ACC, CACCA.

[15] George W. Stone to the President, January 10, 1980. Stone was president of the Oklahoma Farmers Union. Marvin Scherler et al. to Bergland, January 9, 1980. Marvin Scherler and others were members of the Stillwater office of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. For both preceding items, see TSC, LS, CACCA. See *National Journal*, March 8, 1980, 384-88, for an extended discuss of the political implications of the embargo.

[16] News: US Sen. Henry Bellmon, April 25, 1980, press release, box 4, folder 8, ACC, CACCA; *National Journal*, September 6, 1980, 1480-83, and July 19, 1980, 1197. The Soviets purchased grain from other suppliers, some of whom then turned to the United States for the grain reserve. See editorials in *New York Times*, August 4, 1980, *Des Moines (IA) Register*, February 19, 1980, and *Lincoln (NE) Journal*, September 24, 1980.

[17] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, March 24, 1981, press release, box 5, folder 5, ACC, CACCA; *National Journal*, May 23, 1981, 916-19, includes analysis of the "no frills" approach of the Reagan administration.

[18] See *National Journal*, October 31, 1981, 1932, for support prices; *Daily Oklahoman*, February 13, 1982, and March 2, 1982, both items in box 5, folder 6, ACC, CACCA.

[19] Henry Bellmon testimony, March 8, 1982, box 4, folder 8, ACC, CACCA.

[20] For an excellent discussion of the Farm Credit System, see the article by Kerry Webb in *Economic Review*, June 1980, 16-30. This journal is a publication of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. See also News: US Sen. David L. Boren, July 22, 1982, press release, box 5, folder 6, ACC, CACCA; "Smaller Farms Hurt Most," *Daily Oklahoman,* September 17, 1982, 155.

[21] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, September 28, 1982, press release; Senator David Boren's Agricultural Update 1982 Fair Edition, both preceding items found in box 5, folder 6, ACC, CACCA.

[22] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, January 26, 1983, press release, box 5, folder 7, ACC, CACCA.

[23] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, February 24, 1983, press release, and David Boren to John Block, April 8, 1983, both preceding items in box 5, folder 7, ACC, CACCA.

[24] *Wichita Farm Credit Bank*, directors report, September 1983, box 1, folder 6, David McCurdy Collection, Legislative Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as DMC, LS, CACCA); *Oklahoma Wheat Commission News*, 1983, newsletter; David Boren to Mr. Secretary, September

2, 1983, discusses the impact of the drought on Oklahoma agriculture, box 5, folder 7, ACC, CACCA. On September 21, 1983, Agriculture Secretary John R. Block told the US House of Representatives Agriculture Committee that drought stricken farmers could not expect much new help from Washington, DC, *Congressional Quarterly*, September 24, 1983, 1990.

[25] Marvin Duncan, "Financing Agriculture in the 1980s," *Economic Review*, July-August 1983, 3-6. See also Duncan and Mark Drabenstott, "Better Times Ahead for Agriculture," 22-23, in the December 1983 *Economic Review*, December 1983, 22-23.

[26] Donald E. Wilkinson to Members of Congress (1984), excerpt, box 1, folder 6, DMC, LS, CACCA. Donald Wilkinson was the governor of the Farm Credit Association. See Neil Harl, *The Farm Debt Crisis of the 1980s* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 161, for quote regarding the indifference in Washington, DC, and passim. Harl's excellent monograph focuses largely on the crisis in the corn belt. See Glenn English, press release, January 31, 1984, box 1, folder 6, DMC, LS, CACCA. English introduced a bill calling for foreclosure protection. See also Dale Minnick et al. to David McCurdy, April 16, 1984, box 1, folder 19, DMC, LS, CACCA. The members of the Oklahoma Wheat Commission thanked McCurdy for his efforts to expand markets for agricultural products. Boren also sought to improve trade by introducing a resolution to modify the trade agreement with the Soviet Union; see Cong. Rec., 98th Congress, 2nd Session, S10,943-44 (September 11, 1984). For the cattle industry, see *Sunday Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), April 29, 1984, newspaper clipping, box 1, folder 12, DMC, LS, CACCA.

[27] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, November 28, 1984, press release, box 5, folder 8, ACC, CACCA; see also Harl, *Farm Debt Crisis*, 263, for press reports.

[28] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, January 28, 1985, press release, box 5, folder 9, ACC, CACCA. The filibuster can be followed in stories filed by Allan Cromley that appeared in the *Daily Oklahoman* on February 16, February 19, February 20, February 21, February 22, and February 24, 1985, box 59, folder 10, Mickey Edwards Collection, Press and Speeches Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as MEC, PSS, CACCA).

[29] *Tulsa World,* February 24, 1985, story by Ralph Marler puffing Boren, and the *Daily Oklahoman*, February 24, 1985, story by Allan Cromley, both items in box 59, folder 10, MEC, PSS, CACCA. See also *Tulsa Tribune*, February 25, 1985, story by Marilyn Duck, box 59, folder 10, MED, PSS, CACCA.

[30] *Daily Oklahoman,* February 15, 1985, for story on firing David Stockman and John Block, box 59, folder 10, MEC, PSS, CACCA; Mike Synar to Dear Colleague, February 28, 1985, box 1, folder 6, DMC, LS, CACCA.

[31] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, March 16, 1985, press release, box 5, folder 9, ACC, CACCA; Boren to the Editor, *Daily Oklahoman*, March 6, 1985, box 59, folder 11, MEC, PSS, CACCA.

[32] *Daily Oklahoman*, March 11, 1985, 13; See Harl, *Farm Debt Crisis*, 189, regarding 1985 as height of the crisis; *Report of the Bank Commissioner of the State of Oklahoma*, 1985 through 1989, Office of the Bank Commissioner, State of Oklahoma. The commissioner's survey introduces each annual report.

[33] *Daily Oklahoman*, February 10, 1985, 238.

[34] *Daily Oklahoman*, July 11, 1985, 52; August 9, 1985, 27; and November 1, 1985, 29.

[35] *Daily Oklahoman*, July 6, 1985, 26.

[36] Ibid.

[37] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, September 13 and 20, 1985, press releases, and David Boren to John Block, September 16, 1985, all items found in box 5, folder 9, ACC, CACCA.

[38] *Daily Oklahoman and Oklahoma City Times,* March 15, 1985, 18; *Daily Oklahoman,* March 26, 1985, 33, includes President Ronald Reagan's quips.

[39] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, July 16, July 23, November 1, and November 9, 1985, press releases; *Daily Oklahoman and Oklahoma City Times*, April 19, 1985, all items found in box 5, folder 9, ACC, CACCA.

[40] *Daily Oklahoman*, April 20, 1985, 14; and November 12, 1985, 13.

[41] Boren: Farm Credit Amendment, November 14, 1985, box 5, folder 9, ACC, CACCA; *Daily Oklahoman,* December 4, 1985, 3; News: US Sen. David L. Boren, December 16, 1985, press release, box 5, folder 9, ACC, CACCA.

[42] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, March 11, 1986, press release, box 5, folder 10, ACC, CACCA.

[43] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, March 5, April 9, April 10, 1986, press releases, all preceding items found in box 5, folder 10, ACC, CACCA; *Daily Oklahoman,* April 27, 1986, 23. At the same time David Boren was introducing bills, so too, for example, were Glenn English, Mike Synar, Jim Jones, and David McCurdy. Only Boren attracted wide attention and was best able to secure legislative assistance.

[44] Congressional Rural Caucus, "Bank Failures at FDIC Insured Institution . . . ," April 30, 1986; "Ailing Bank Jolts Oklahoma," *New York Times*, April 29, 1986, both preceding items found in box 1, folder 23, DMC, LS, CACCA. For the failure of the First National Bank in Enid, see the *Journal Record*, November 7, 1986, 1, box 1, folder 23, DMC, LS, CACCA. Farm Credit Services, news release, May 1986, box 1, folder 6; *Daily Oklahoman,* May 8, 1986, 33, and May 18, 1986, 33. For efforts by the state to aid struggling farmers, see *Daily Oklahoman,* July 13, 1986, 7.

[45] *Daily Oklahoman,* July 4, 1986, 38. For a story about one farm suicide, see *Daily Oklahoman,* July 11, 1986, 23.

[46] News: US Sen. David L. Boren, June 19, July 16, July 31, August 1, 1986, press releases, all preceding items found in box 5, folder 11, ACC, CACCA. For proposals by other legislators, see Mickey Edwards, press release, August 4, 1986, and the *American Agriculture Movement Reporter*, March 1987, two preceding items found in box 72, file 64, MEC, PSS, CACCA; see also story on the National Farm Congress in *Daily Oklahoman,* September 28, 1986, 17; Mark Drabenstott and Alan Barkema, "U.S. Agriculture on the Mend," *Economic Review*, December 1987, 28-29; Harl, *Farm Debt Crisis*, 141.

[47] *Daily Oklahoman,* March 15, 1987, 4; March 26, 1987, 17; May 24, 1987, 31; and May 31, 1987, 29.

[48] *Daily Oklahoman,* July 30, 1987, 1; August 3, 1987, 63; and November 25, 1987, 27; and *Economic Review*, December 1987, 41.