



Harold E. Stassen, candidate for Republican nomination for president of the United States, tells his position on a farm program. He believes there should be . . .

Harold Stassen visits with his parents on the back steps of the old Stassen home

"No more bad times for farmers"

By Gordon A. Sabine, *experienced newspaperman and at present a teacher in the University of Minnesota School of Journalism. Gordon was assigned by Successful Farming to interview Mr. Stassen, who has ranked high in farmer-opinion polls. This story emphasizes Mr. Stassen's views on governmental policies affecting the farmer and his family. As other presidential candidates announce their views concerning programs for agriculture, we shall endeavor to place their views before you.*

THE brawny, block-shouldered, farm-built man measured his words.

"No reason for us ever to have another agricultural depression," he said.

"No more bad times for farmers," he repeated. "I mean every syllable of it."

The man was Harold E. Stassen, candidate for the Republican nomination for president of the United States.

He says he knows the answers to agricultural depressions. He says that, with the farm policy he is urging, the farmer need never again get in a hole.

What are his policies? And what's the man like?

Successful Farming asked me to find out, so I spent a day with the former Minnesota governor in his St. Paul office. I asked him a lot of questions on farm-policy programs. In this article are his answers straight from the shoulder.

Stassen won't be 41 until April 13, 1948. He was the youngest governor in the country when he headed Minnesota. He got there like a shot, too—out of high school when he was 14, a law degree from the University of Minnesota before he was 21, a bunch of jobs along the way ranging from running the farm the year his dad was sick, to working nights as a railroad conductor.

Harold really doesn't need to have books and "ex-

perts" on agriculture. He's lived it.

He was born in the farmhouse his father built room-by-room. His folks have farmed there 50 years and still make their living from the soil. Harold sold fruit and vegetables at a roadside stand to help make money when he was going to high school. He won prizes on his vegetables at state fairs, and picked up a bit more change raising pigeons, rabbits, and guinea pigs—when he was 13 years old.

Up to a couple of years ago, Harold's father still worked the family truck farm at West St. Paul, and took his produce to a St. Paul market stall every summer morning.

While he was governor, the youthful ex-lawyer had established a war-born "A" award for Minnesota farmers who increased their food production or in other agricultural ways helped the war effort during 1942. These awards were the rural counterpart of the Army and Navy "E" for city workers, and more than 100,000 members of farm families on 30,000 farms won them. Then in 1943, Stassen resigned as governor of Minnesota.

When he took off his navy uniform a couple of years ago, Stassen started work at once on the job of getting a presidential nomination. Way too early, folks said. But he wanted to meet a lot of people, and listen to them, and talk to them. He's done just that, too—200,000 miles of traveling in 37 states, nearly 75 full-dress speeches, in less than 24 months.

Not until now, tho, has he made a really complete statement on agriculture.

Here are the questions I asked him, and (without any "dressing up") his answers:

What's the top job for American agriculture today?

STASSEN: Top priority should go to maintaining and expanding our soil-conservation and reclamation programs. We can do that—and still keep our crop

acreage up—by having more government emphasis on nourishment for the soil, and by reclaiming the millions of acres of land that just need water. If we're going to have good land in this country tomorrow, we need to preserve the good soil we have today, and get back some of the soil that can be made fruitful by water, fertilization, and modern cropping methods.

But how can we maintain the acreage we've been planting, and still not overproduce?

STASSEN: I believe it's better to have too large productive capacity, and build consumption up to it, than to have too small a capacity, and have to look elsewhere for help we're not sure we can get. We've added 7 million persons in this country since before the war, and people are eating a lot more. Productive capacity is the basis of our national wealth. Keep it sound, and we'll have no trouble with our pocketbooks.

How do you feel about restrictions on production?

STASSEN: We shouldn't have the government pay the farmer to produce less. It's much better to keep our university and government research workers hunting new industrial uses for farm products. Then, occasional surpluses shouldn't disturb us, so long as we don't let them break down farm prices.

There's been a lot of talk about extending social security to farmers. Do you agree with that idea?

STASSEN: No, but I do think they should have something like social security in the form of a guaranteed minimum income for the family-sized farm.

How much should this minimum be?

STASSEN: Our aim should be to keep farm families, who are doing a good job, from ever again being bankrupt, evicted, or "broke." Whatever figure we set should be in proportion to the social security and unemployment figures—always remembering that a minimum income for a farm doesn't just mean a certain number of calories for every person a day, but enough income to keep the farm plant from going into bankruptcy.

On the other hand, I wouldn't think the large commercial farms should be treated the same. I don't want commercial farms to become the principal part of American agriculture. If we guarantee them unlimited support, the pressure for more larger farms gets stronger, and I want to see it ease off.

You mustn't forget that farming is as much a way of life as a way to making a living. It's the backbone that holds the balance and stability for this country's society.

If we consider that the corn-hog farm of about 240 acres is family-sized, and then figure that a corn-hog farm of 1,200 acres is commercial, we won't just automatically give the 1,200-acre farm five times the minimum income guarantee the 240-acre place gets. The big place would get only the same amount the little one does.

If there were capital available to start an automobile factory in a city, and instead, that money were invested in commercial farming because the government was guaranteeing against losses, even in a bad year, I think that would be wrong.

What about marginal farms that have poor soil, or are too far from market—would they be included in the guaranteed minimum-income plan?

STASSEN: Drawing a line there is going to be hard, but we'll have to try to keep any more of this kind of land from going into farms, and we'll have to work to "retire" what is already being farmed.

We should establish a soil-fertility reserve, just like we have reserves of oil and minerals and natural resources. To do that, we'll have to set aside large areas of land, keep people from starting wrong on them, and hold them as reserve for later needs. That's good business in any line.

Do you consider soil conservation, then, a job for government?

STASSEN: Not alone. I think the individual farmer, the state, and the national government have to share this work. As I see it, the organization should be in the hands of the local farmers, working thru the state. The only federal relationship would be directly with the state, and there wouldn't be any direct contact between Washington and the farmer.

What about government controls on farm cooperatives?

STASSEN: I think we should have some sort of government control—but not to eliminate or hinder the co-ops. When the co-ops go into the consumer field, I think we should work out arrangements to help them fit into the small business of the community. The goal would be to help the co-ops do an even better job.

A lot of farm areas don't have good hospitals now—what can we do about that?

STASSEN: Plenty. We ought to have a zone hospital plan, for major agricultural areas that don't have the right kind of hospital facilities. This would mean federal and state help in putting up the best kind of modern hospital we know how to build. Locate it centrally in a small village. Elect 15 of your best public-minded farmers and small-town residents as a board of trustees, and let them fill their own vacancies.

Make this hospital serve the entire area by giving it "spokes of mercy"—mobile health clinics, in special trucks, that can fan out over the countryside, bringing immediate help to smaller health clinics, and even right to the farm door. Let these traveling units do immunizations and vaccinations on a large scale. Keep the charges way down.

While I'm on the subject, I think there are a lot of other places where we need government help to make sure the farmer gets the proper benefits of his income. We should see that his educational opportunities are greatly improved. He should have better roads. He should have a greater chance to electrify. He should have the same centers of education, enjoyment, and culture that the city people do.

What about health insurance for farm residents?

STASSEN: I think we should have a government-operated insurance plan for big hospital bills from sickness or accidents—say those running over \$250. The premiums should be small.

What about aid to Europe—what can the individual farmer do to help?

STASSEN: He can help in the production of food, and in paying the taxes the plan will cost us. At the same time he'll be helping himself by providing an additional guarantee that farm prices won't go down too much in the next few years.

What restrictions should be put on the food we send Europe?

STASSEN: It ought to go only to those countries that are willing to help themselves, and it ought to go with some assurance that some day we won't be frozen out from selling in the countries we're giving to now. Later on, we should have access to these markets on a fair

selling competition, or we shouldn't be helping them today.

Will we always have to ship a lot of food to Europe?

STASSEN: We'll certainly need to ship a great deal more than we did before the war. There are more people living in Europe today than in 1940. And there's not as much food moving from eastern to western Europe any more; the people living in the East are eating more of what they produce themselves. Of course, there simply isn't any food coming west from the Russianized countries of Europe.

What about these Russianized countries and Communism?

STASSEN: I'm all against sending food or machinery or tools to Russia or any other nation where such materials might become a part of a Communist war machine.

And I'm all in favor of providing Europe with the full amount of aid she needs under the Marshall Plan. I see the Plan as a wall against Communism.

Even with the additional help we send Asia and other parts of the world, we'll be giving up only about one-tenth of our production of tangible goods and food a year.

Surely this sacrifice isn't too much to set up a humanitarian blockade against Communism.

How can we stop rising prices?

STASSEN: First, we have to level off wages. Then we need to cut the price of food.

Our people should reduce their food consumption 20 percent; food prices then ought to drop about 15 percent. The whole program, of course, should be voluntary, not compulsory.

Some people claim I'm unwise to propose this, because it will mean that farmers will receive a bit less for their products. I feel this claim insults the intelligence of the American farmer. I am confident that farmers would much prefer a slightly lower price in 1948, instead of boom prices and a depression crash later.

What do you think is agriculture's place in our nation today?

STASSEN: Obviously, agriculture must prosper to have the whole country prosper. If we are to prevent "booms and busts" in America, we must get agriculture settled down to a good, steady life. We simply must not have any more agricultural depressions, and my policy would be to use all the best economic principles we know to outlaw such depressions.

I don't believe we need to be worried about the farmers holding up their end of our production system. As I see it, our job today is to provide an economy in which they can produce to the maximum, and continue to do that with reasonable safety.

HIS ideas on agriculture aren't all of Harold Stassen's program, naturally.

He is a powerful, direct dealer, and in his state administration, he made a reputation for improving Minnesota roads, cutting the state debt, instituting a pioneer labor-relations program with a helpful cooling-off period that has avoided many a strike.

He also cut the number of state employees 25 percent, and made old-guard, state political leaders gnash their teeth at his independent action.

He rose to the rank of captain in the navy, and was a United States delegate to the U.N. conference in San Francisco.

Undoubtedly, he is as close to the soil as any other presidential candidate of any party has been for many years. **END**



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