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STATEMENT BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

Upon Introducing Bill To

PERPETUATE FARMER-ELECTED COMMITTEE SYSTEM

Mr. President, I send to the desk a bill to preserve and perpetuate the great farmer-elected committee system developed throughout rural America in the last two decades. It is a system through which farmers themselves administer their own farm programs.

During the past 20 eventful years, farmers have come to a new awareness, that they must make their voices heard if they are to have the kind of program they want and need. They realize more than ever that they must actively participate in guiding these programs along sound and practical lines if the desired results are to be obtained.

Through practical experience over the years, and with the valuable help of sympathetic legislators, farmers have developed the democratically-elected farmer-committee system.

This system has proved to be a most effective means for farmers themselves to share in the formulation and administration of farm programs. Regardless of partisan political differences over farm policy or its administration, the principle of farmers running their own farm programs, through farmer-committees they themselves elect from among their own neighbors, has become a proven success.

I have long been convinced that the system of freely-elected farmer committeemen is an example of economic democracy which no other country, and no other branch of American free enterprise, can equal.

This system of farmer-participation in the administration of farm programs has been a very real factor in the amazing progress of our agriculture during the past 20 years. In my opinion, and in the opinion of most farmers with whom I have talked, it should certainly be maintained to meet adequately the new challenges to agriculture that still lie ahead.

I am deeply concerned, however, over indications that the Department of Agriculture is now seeking to minimize the participation of such farmer-committees in the operation of our farm programs.

There has always been some, for one reason or another, who have objected to farmers having a direct voice in the administration of their farm programs. In the main, the opposition has come from foes of the farm price support programs who realize the difficulty of undermining those programs, or rendering them useless and ineffective, as long as farmers themselves are responsible for administering them.

The opposition has not come out in the open with frontal attacks upon the right of farmers to have an active voice in their own affairs; rather, it has used more subtle approaches in an attempt to discredit the farmer committees, or to trim their sails by making them only "advisory" insteadof having any real administrative authority. END A

I regret to say that the new Secretary of Agriculture appears to have been taken in by some of this subtle propaganda. That is my interpretation of the Department of Agriculture's order of March 20, sharply curtailing activities of the farmer-elected committees, and in fact reducing such activities to the bare minimum level possible without action by Congress.

The order requires the farmer-elected county PMA committees -- men chosen by their own neighbors, to administer the agricultural conservation, price support, crop insurance, and other programs -- to turn over their policy-execution functions to "a county office manager". The same order requires the state PMA committees to turn over their policy-execution functions to an "executive officer".

I am sure Secretary Benson would disclaim any intent at this time to abolish the farmer-elected committees. Yet that may well be the eventual effect of his recent order. It decreases, rather than increases, farmer participation in the administration

of farm programs. It makes such committees only advisory in fact, with no real functions to give them purpose and no real responsibility to make them any more than figureheads.

Such a move at this time assumes much greater significance in view of the increased authority requested for the Secretary of Agriculture under Reorganization Plan No. 2, now before the Congress. If Reorganization Plan No. 2 is approved, it would give the Secretary of Agriculture full authority to complete the job of emasculating the committees, transfering from the control of such farmer committees the agricultural conservation program and other programs now assigned to them under existing law.

That is what my bill seeks to prevent.

It is entirely in accord with the spirit and the letter of pledges made to American farmers by President Eisenhower during his campaign.

Repeatedly, President Eisenhower assured farmers he would let them run their own farm programs.

At Kasson, Minnesota, he said:

"I pledge you that the Republican Party is going foward with positive, aggressive, farmer-run farm programs .... Our goal will be sound, farmer-run programs that safeguard agriculture .... the programs must be transferred into genuinely farmer-run operations..."

At Columbia, South Carolina, he said:

"Management and direction of the farm program , ... federally financed though it will be ... must be turned over to the farmer."

At St. Cloud, Minnesota:

"At Kasson, I had the opportunity to outline a part of the farm program that the Republicans will support and urge and operate ... There was another part of it; that every kind of program adopted for the future would be farmer-run, locally-run".

At New Orleans:

"What we need is to start from here and build a better program based on more farmer participation..."

At Memphis:

"I pledge you an administration that will cleanse all farm programs of partisan politics, that will decentralize their administration, that will increase farmer participation in their own programs."

And, in a televised interview on October 28, President Eisenhower firmly pledged:

"We want farmer-built policies, with farmer-run programs."

Mr. President, I submit that today we are being herded along directly the opposite course. The recent action of Secretary Benson in regard to farmer-committees is directly contrary to President Eisenhower's campaign pledges.

The big commercial farmers, the big processing and trade groups and economists, are all represented in the new administration -- but the voice of the average farmer is in danger of being lost.

The middleman seems to have replaced the farmer as the key advisor in the Department of Agriculture these days. Meat buyers are invited in for a discussion about whether cattle prices are falling too low. Big city bankers are called to Washington to discuss whether or not farmers have enough credit available. Food dealers and processors are named to various advisory

committees -- and fewer and fewer farmers are evident -- real farmers who must make their living by their farming enterprises.

Let me give you just one example.

Many of us are seriously concerned with the depressed situation in the dairy industry. Our concern is with the plight of dairy farmers -- the milk producers. After repeated insistance that he assert some leadership toward improving conditions for dairy farmers, Secretary Benson called a dairy conference in April to discuss the formulation of some new program for dairying. It was announced at that time that analysis and coordination of the various recommendations by a smaller "task force" committee would be necessary. He has now named that "task force" to write and make public the dairy industry's suggestions, and here is how it is constituted: 3 out of 20 members, represent dairy production; 3 represent fluid milk distribution; six represent manufactured dairy products; 4 represent wholesaling and distribution firms; 2 represent retail

stores and restaurants; and 2 represent the realm of research, education and promotion.

The classifications are Secretary Bensons's, not my own.

I am sure we all welcome any contribution any of these dairy distributors, processors, wholesalers, or retailers can make; but I am sure too that many dairy farmers are going to be skeptical about such a group being primarily concerned with the producers' welfare.

Secretary Benson says "we are here to help -- not dictate". The question beginning to arise is, "help who?" It has always been my understanding that the primary responsibility of the Department of Agriculture was to the agricultural producers -- the farmers. Now, it seems, a new concept is arising.

Under Secretary of Agriculture True D. Morse, addressing the annual meeting of the National Cheese Institute in Chicago April 28, had this to say:

"Agriculture must be dealt with as a total industry -- taking in all those who produce, store, finance, sell, process, and otherwise work with farmers and farm products. The narrow view is to consider only the 16 percent of the population now living in farms. Such a limited approach will restrict agricultural progress."

Is the Voice of Big Business going to squeeze out the Voice of Agriculture -- in the Agricultural Department itself?

I'm sure we hope not. Yet I'm disturbed at the extent to which those whose primary concern is not about the welfare of the individual farmer, are suddenly emerging in the forefront of attempts to make over our farm policies. I don't like seeing Wall Street farmers -- businessmen and speculators who farm the farmers -- attempting to dictate farm policy for this country.

I don't mean to attack processors and buyers and middlemen handling farm products. I wish them well; I want them to be successful. But I don't want them to be manipulating farm policies to protect their own interests at the expense of the farmers. If they are going to be given such a friendly ear in the Department of Agriculture, I want to make sure the farmer isn't forgotten

either. I want to make sure the farmer isn't lost in the shuffle.

That's why I am asking the Congress to enact the bill I am introducing to establish by statute the functions of the farmer-committee system, to assure the farmers they won't entirely lose a voice in what should be their own Department of government.

I realize there has been a lot of talk by Secretary Benson and his aides about the "extensive use" they are making of advisory groups. I have tried to illustrate how far out-voted the farmer is on one such group. It's just as true on others. Bu t even when farmer-members are included on such committees, there is good reason to question how closely they represent the average farmer.

Let me tell you why. When theDepartment of Agriculture felt in need of special consultations with farm people in the past,

it invited representatives in from various areas of the country, and paid their expenses so they could come. Secretary Benson has changed all that. He has invoked new rules. Members of such advisory committees must meet their own expenses.

That creates no problem for agricultural business firms sending representatives. They pay the expenses, and deduct it from income taxes. It's no problem for trade groups maintaining professional lobbying staffs here for just such purposes. But it is quite a problem for the farmer. How many average family farmers do you suppose are in a position to drop their work and run to Washington at their own expense, to try and make their voice heard against the voices of processors and other middlemen?

Let us remember that when we hear about these "advisory committees". The kind of committees I want to see representing agriculture are farmer committees, chosen by the farmers themselves. That's why I want to see the farmer-committee system written into law where it can't be tampered with.

Let me explain the bill I have introduced.

It merely requires the Secretary of Agriculture, in carrying out provisions of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, to continue to utilize the services of local and State committees established under that Act; it requires that the services of such committees be utilized in carrying out farm price support and crop insurance programs; and it provides for the election of state committees by members of county committees.

The statutes now provide for the ACP program to be carried out by such committees. All this billdoes is to assure that provision remains in effect regardless of any reorganizational proposal.

Price support programs and crop insurance programs have in the past been administered by these committees, and successfully so. All this bill does is to make that accepted practice a statutory requirement -- to prevent any change from the farmer-run administration of programs now in existence.

The only new proposal in my bill is for the election of state committees by members of county committees, instead of appointment by the Secretary of Agriculture. I believe such a change is the real way to end, once and for all, the various charges that the farmer-committees are being used for partisan political purposes.

The Republican party talked much during the campaign about taking "agriculture out of politics". Here is a chance to do it. Farmers now elect their own community and county committees, in true democratic processes. My proposal is that members of these farmer-elected county committees, in turn, should themselves elect the state committees.

Farmers have frequently expressed the hope that the principle of democratically-elected committees could be carried to its logical conclusion, by leaving the choice of state as well as county committees up to the farmers themselves rather than risk it becoming a plaything of political patronage.

Mr President, we have heard many times on this floor charges of "politics" hurled at the PMA committees. I have never concurred in such charges, because I know that I had nothing to say about the appointment of the state PMA committee in Minnesota; it was not chosen as a matter of patronage, it was chosen from farmers out of the ranks of county committeemen and fieldmen.

There is cause to question whether that policy is still being followed. When a new PMA chairman was chosen for my state, newspapers reported he had been "cleared" through the Republican Senator from Minnesota.

If the Administration meant what it pledged about keeping patronage out of the Department of Agriculture's field organization, I would welcome some evidence of it by support for my proposal.

My bill is concerned only with the local administration of farm programs out in the states and counties, not with the internal supervisory structure of the Department of Agriculture in

Washington. It will not interfere with structural reorganization of the Department, unless it is the Department's intent by such reorganization to abolish the use of farmer-elected committees.

My bill requires the use of such committees and assigns them specific functions, but does not label the farmer-committees as belonging under the Production and Marketing Administration or any other individual agency of the Department. My concern is with protecting the farmer's voice in these programs, not with what any agency is called in any reorganization shuffle.

I believe the bill I am propsoing is a constructive one entitled to widespread support. In view of President Eisenhower's determined pledges to strengthen, rather than weaken, the principle of farmer-run programs, I see no reason why this bill should not be welcomed by many of my colleagues from farm areas on the other side of the aisle. They know, I am sure, that farmers want to preserve their right to help shape and administer

the farm programs through their own direct participation in choosing county committees. They know, as a general rule, farmers are not as concerned with partisan politics as they are with agricultural politics -- they just want a fair break for agriculture, from whatever party they can get it.

I would offer just one more thought for my colleagues in the Senate in regard to politics in our farm programs.

I pose this question to experienced, practical politicians: If you were trying to build a political machine, which would be more useful and more easily controlled -- a corps of new federal employees, appointed outside civil service regulations, covering every rural county in every state in the country, or a group of farmer-committees elected by the local farmers themselves over which there is no appointive or disciplinary power?

I want the Senate to think that over, in view of the Benson Plan for substituting appointive "county mangers" for elected farmer-committees in every PMA office in the country.

Let me just briefly contrast the new Administration's apparent patronage approach to agriculture's field organization with a description of what I feel the real role of farmer-committees should be.

I want to quote that description from an address by former Under Secretary of Agriculture Clarence J.McCormick, last September 24, at the annual state meeting of PMA county committeemen in Indianapolis, Indiana:

> "Your responsibility, as farmer-committeemen, is to provide the grass roots leadership in maintaining and conserving our productive resources.
>
> "It is your responsibility to help inspire the kind of teamwork that will be needed to get the job done.
>
> "That responsibility is not owed to the Department of Agriculture, or to the Government. Instead, your responsibility is to your fellow farmers who have chosen you for your work as committeemen; your responsibility is to agriculture, and agriculture's responsibility is to all the people of the Nation.
>
> "And by the same token, that is where the Department of Agriculture's responsibility belongs, and that is where those of us who have come up through your ranks to posts of leadership in the Department are constantly striving to keep it".

That's what the farmer-committee system means to American agriculture, and that's the kind of leadership it produces from its own ranks.

It is becoming increasingly clear that agriculture now needs, more than ever, the watchdog protection of the farmer-elected committees.

When some among us sought to sound a note of warning about falling farm prices earlier this year, we were at first scoffed at. Then, when it became apparent that wasn't enough of an answer for farmers, the line was switched to how long ago the decline in prices started. Farmers finnaly made it rather clear they weren't interested in wrangling about when things started going to pot; they were concenned with what is happening to farm prices right now -- today.

So the Department of Agriculture waved a wand and announced prices were stabilized, the drop had been halted in cattle prices, and that everything would be all right from now on. That was more than a month ago. But everything hasn't been all right. Cattle markets must not

have seen the Department's press release, prices have continued to fall. For the month ending April 15, according to a Bureau of Agricultural Economics announcement last week, the index of all farm prices fell two more ~~points~~ percents. The parity ratio, which was 100 up to the November election, is now down to 93.

Farmers are still disturbed over the uncertain future of our farm programs. Crippling budget slashes indicate a desire to wipe out some of the programs through the backdoor of appropriations, if it can't be done directly and more above-board by specific legislation.

We still have very little assurance of what kind of price support farmers are going to get after next year -- if any. Several bills have been introduced to improve the price support legislation, among them one of my own. I have been unable to learn, however, of any plans to hold hearings on these price support bills.

In view of all these uncertainties facing the farmer, in view of repeated pledges that he was going to get a bigger voice in farm

affairs rather than be squeezed out of the picture, I suggest that the very least we can do is to save the farmer-committee system from destruction through the measure I have proposed, to give that accepted principle permanent status of law.

Perhaps this will bring a showdown, on where the farmer stands with the new Administration.

We have been told repeatedly that the basis of the Benson Plan for agriculture is that farmers should shift for themselves.

Now perhaps we can learn if the Benson Plan contemplates letting farmers have any voice at all in the future conduct of their affairs.

The farmer has a right to know.

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