A Demonstration of Techniques and Materials Used in Promoting a Discussion of Public Policy

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This demonstration of how we generate discussion of farm policy matters is designed to give a picture of the points emphasized and the illustrations used. When setting the stage for these discussions, an attempt is made to get the audience in a good frame of mind by very frankly stating that it is the purpose to work with them by leading a discussion of "Some Considerations Relating to Agricultural Policy." It is pointed out that: (1) decisions pertaining to agricultural policy are important, (2) farmers have a responsibility to work with their friends and neighbors in agriculture and other businesses in trying to decide what they would like to accomplish through farm programs, (3) each individual has a responsibility to get across his ideas to the Congressmen and Senators who will make the legislative decisions, and (4) agriculture is in politics and farmers should recognize the realities of the political implications.

It is suggested that if farm people are given all of the essential facts, they are capable of making fair and reasonable decisions. It is pointed out, however, that there are many indications that farm people have been called upon to make decisions for which they do not have adequate background information. At this point a series of stories, illustrating the need for understanding the viewpoints of others, distinguishing between facts and prejudices, and becoming familiar with essential background, are introduced to get the audience relaxed and in a frame of mind to discuss policy objectives.

Now the audience is asked to join in the discussion by suggesting what a farm program should do for farm people. The following are the most frequently suggested objectives:

Give farmers a fair share of the income
Provide for improving technology
Insure full production
Maintain family-size farms
Provide expanding markets
Insure efficient production
Insure efficient marketing
Leave farmers free to manage their farms
Provide income stability
Provide a workable program

Each of these objectives is discussed individually as it is listed on a flannel board. The listing is done either by preparing on the spot a statement of the objective or by using a prepared copy which closely resembles the item suggested and representing it as the suggestion of a farmer in some previous meeting.

The discussion of these individual objectives usually embraces a wide range of subject matter. For example, when discussing a fair share of the income, the discussion leader raises a question as to whose judgment the group is willing to accept when deciding what is fair. Furthermore, what would be fair to everyone? It is the practice of the discussion leader to refrain from answering questions. This is usually accomplished by returning to the audience a question which is calculated to generate thinking and lead into other questions which will help the group to arrive at a basis for mutual agreement. Generally speaking, most audiences agree that an economic climate should be maintained which will enable farmers to realize a return for the use of their capital, labor, and management comparable to the returns which may be obtained by a similar amount when used elsewhere in the economy with the same degree of efficiency.

The discussion of these objectives may continue for forty to fifty minutes, depending upon the response of the audience. Before the interest wanes, the leader shifts the discussion to a consideration of the processes by which decisions are now made through the market place. He accomplishes this shift by introducing the idea that certain limitations as well as possibilities might well be considered before an effort is made to relieve the economic difficulties of farmers by tampering with the pricing mechanism.

At this point a series of illustrations is set in motion to show how the consumer proceeds in making choices concerning the expenditure of the limited supply of dollars at his or her disposal for the things desired and thereby shares in decisions as to what shall be produced. In putting across this illustration, the leader places a figure representing the consumer, surrounded by a supply of dollars, at the left side of a 3 foot by 6 foot flannel board. The consumer is then represented as having examined the opportunities for getting various kinds of meat. On the basis of this information, he or she decides to send some of the dollars out in quest of broiler meat. These dollars are strung across the board to the market place, at which point the price thermometer registers the demand for broilers. Some of the dollars are then moved beyond the market place across to the right edge of the flannel board.

At this point several types of farmers are shown by pictures of their operations. These fellows are represented as listening to the call of

the consumer's dollars. Some act in response to the call of the broiler dollars and shift a portion of their resources into the broiler business. A string of broilers is then shown flowing out of this new production resource to the market place. When they reach the market the price thermometer is adjusted downward. To the left of the market the broilers, ready for the pan, are shown moving to the consumer.

Emphasis is then given to the fact that the consumer reigns supreme in the market place. His or her wishes are relayed in a relatively short time through the pricing mechanism to the producers, who act on the basis of their best judgment in response to the wishes expressed by the consumer. It is further emphasized that all people, including farmers, are consumers, since by virtue of their production each is entitled to rights in consumption.

It is then shown that the consumer can, through the addition of more dollars, call into the broiler business a larger share of the resources. In similar manner, by the withdrawing of dollars, consumers also signal broiler producers to cut off production. It is then suggested that this automatic market operates on the assumption that *everyone knows more than anyone*. In other words, everyone shares through the pricing mechanism in the making of decisions as to what should be produced, how much should be produced, and by whom it should be produced.

It is then suggested that in view of the fact that prices sometimes fall suddenly, a fair price should be maintained as a minimum in the market place. In order to make this minimum price a firm commitment, the hand of government is introduced by placing a peg in the price thermometer. Now the consumer decides that she will not buy broilers at the pegged price. Therefore, she withholds her dollars from the market place. But the message is not relayed to the producers because of the built-in short circuit at the point of the peg. Therefore, the producers continue to produce as though in response to the desires of the consumer. Consequently, broilers pile up in the market place. At this point a symbol is placed by the market which represents supports. The audience, is then shown that this symbol is a two-sided coin. One half is lifted to reveal that the other side carries the word "controls." This half is then placed in the vicinity of the producers. Meanwhile, broilers are still piling up in the market, so government storage is shown in the form of Uncle Sam's hat. The crown which the consumer has been wearing to indicate his or her sovereignty in the market place is now shifted to the head of Uncle Sam. Then a line of dressed broilers is shown running from the market place under Uncle Sam's hat.

Meanwhile, the producers who have been sending these broilers into the market place are receiving payment through dollars which the hand of government has taken from the consumer as taxes. These are used to replace the consumer dollars withheld from the market. In making this replacement, the consumer dollars which were taken out in the form of taxes are turned over to show the reverse side. On this side there is a wedge-shaped black portion which represents the service charges for doing for the consumer what she has previously been doing herself. This illustrates that these dollars have less purchasing power than when used directly by the consumer. Therefore, more of them are required to do the same job.

Now the audience is asked who is making the decisions as to what should be produced, how much should be produced, and by whom it should be produced. The discussion soon develops the idea that the market is hand-operated. It is a controlled market in which *someone or some group of someones must presume to know more than everybody.* The controllers are now responsible for making decisions as to what everyone should have, how much should be available, and at what price.

After illustrating the things for which responsibility must be taken when tampering with the market place, it is then shown that the consumer will be resourceful to the extent of finding other meats that are more attractive than broilers at the pegged price. This is illustrated by having the consumer send out a few of the dollars remaining after taxes, to buy meat priced lower than the fixed price for broilers. These dollars, in similar manner, are registered in the market place on another price thermometer and move across the board to a beef cattle farmer. Cattle are shown moving to market in response to the call of the dollars, and hamburger, and other cuts are shown moving from the market to the consumer.

It becomes evident that if consumers are left to their own devices they may well be expected to circumvent the operation of the control program and rely upon other items. This idea is tied in with the presentation of controls referred to earlier. The controls are shown in the form of a pyramid to illustrate how controlling one group of items calls for controls on others and how they in turn call for still others, and so on.

This type of presentation is designed to stimulate thinking among farm people and to alert them to the possibilities and limitations. An understanding of the market place is essential to intelligent discussion of many aspects of agricultural policy. This is especially true of foreign trade.