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PROCEEDINGS
of the
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UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING
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to the individual and to society than no productivity at all. Our challenge is not to make one sector the scape-goat for the others but instead to do a better job in planning our manpower needs including provision of training opportunities to bring about the skills demanded by changing technology.

It should not be assumed that agriculture should be made the residual employer of labor unable to find work elsewhere. Neither farmers nor workers are willing to accept such a decision.

Administratively fixed and rising labor costs have forced farm laborers into unemployment. Continued programs for fixing wages above productivity levels of the farm worker will add to the already large pool of unemployed Americans.

Farm labor policy is a matter of vital concern to economists and sociologists. It seems however, that church groups, labor unions, and other nonagricultural groups are the most active in farm labor policy formulation. For some reason agricultural economists have not had a strong voice in determining farm labor policy. To continue to stay out of this problem area will be a serious neglect of our responsibility.

DISCUSSION: THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AND AGRICULTURE:
STABILIZATION PROBLEMS: LABOR POLICY

Eldon E. Weeks
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Firch hypothesizes that a "sufficient explanation of the postwar stability of farm income can be found in structural changes in the nonfarm economy--aside from government policies for agriculture." Then he takes as a premise that the separation of the 'farm problem' into categories of general level and stability of incomes is valid and useful and he focuses his attention on the stability category.

One, of course, must take something as given in order to delimit an investigation. One might ask, in this case, if the categories of general level of income and stability of income are assumed to be mutually exclusive. If they are not, one might wonder as to the nature and degree of interaction or inter-relationship. For example, I tend to believe that policy objectives for income stability are meant to relate to income levels judged to be "adequate." If level of income is judged to be inadequate, I believe that this objective will be given a greater weight than stability of income or that the two objectives will be compounded. However, investigation of the premise Firch used here would require either a study basic to the one he reports or a revised methodology or technique. Perhaps a justification, however brief, of the premise would have been in order. Firch has done a lot of work on this topic and I enjoyed the paper very much. I don't want you or him to think that the question raised with respect to his premise is meant as a criticism because I'm quite sure that he is as aware of the logical implications as anyone else.

The paper presented by Johnson is, to me, particularly refreshing in its concern with data. Prediction related to human behavior is difficult. It is especially difficult when the forecasting period is long enough that institutional and technological relationships are subject to substantial change.

Given a purpose for making a long-run prediction, good judgment is the best tool the predictor has. There are few if any hard-and-fast rules to go by. I think Johnson has made sufficiently clear some areas where good judgment is critical -- (1) selection of data, (2) selection of variables, (3) selection of the proper relationships between and among the variables, and (4) application of a "reasonableness" test to the result.

After a review of presently available predictions of the farm labor force, arrived at by use of differing data series and prediction techniques and formulations, the authors eliminated variations among projection models by developing a model of their own, which they applied to three different data series.

The predicted farm labor force for 1975 varied from 45 to 59 per cent of the 1957-59 average, depending upon which data series was used. The authors appeared to judge the figure 48.8 per cent of the 1957-59 farm labor force most reasonable of any they obtained, although they certainly did not dwell upon their reasons, and I feel they did it with a great deal of trepidation in view of their concern with the data. Perhaps their tests of reasonableness would have resulted in stronger conclusive judgments if a more definite purpose were defined and standard errors presented for the forecasts.

Dawson's conclusions appear to be more related to presenting his version of "oughtness" than to "isness" in farm labor policy. Whether this is proper for economists has long been the subject of spirited discussion among both the members and the members-in-training of our profession. If this brief discussion seems rather heavy handed, it is perhaps because this discussant has taken a position in the other camp.

An evaluation is usually accomplished through comparison of something with something else used as a norm. Both the norm and the technique used in the analysis are supported by assumptions and/or characteristics that render them more or less suitable for the intended evaluation. One of the advantages of specifying the norm and technique is to make them explicit. This discussant thinks it is apparent that some of the norms used to arrive at conclusions in this paper were supplied by the author's value system.

Early in his paper, Dawson takes full employment as the objective of programs concerning farm labor. This he does consistently, and I think it gets him into trouble at points where it would have been more realistic to recognize other related policy and program objectives pertaining to such as over-all economic growth, efficiency in the agricultural sector of the economy, and human welfare. Thus, the author found himself in a position of judging aspects of the employment and wage situation "good" or "bad" according to value judgments, which he supplied, with respect to aggregate levels of welfare and utility implicitly based on judgments relative to magnitudes in their interpersonal distributions.

I think that any discussion of farm labor policy has to distinguish family labor from hired labor--which Dawson has done. However, I think that I would have excluded the discussion of family labor on the grounds that it is rather fully discussed under the usual heading of price and income policy.

This reader was never able to distinguish separate consideration of seasonal and full-time hired farm labor. These would appear, on the surface at least, to

present different kinds of problems for solution with respect to productivity, employment, and welfare.

Dawson appears to be enamored with the self-interest motivations assumed so eloquently and so explicitly in Classical and Neo-Classical Doctrine. I believe that they are important, too, but even Adam Smith recognized that the profit motive wasn't the only economic one. Also, I should like to point out that the legal framework of our National Society was formulated to include a doctrine of economic Laissez Faire. We have been seeking to protect ourselves from undesirable aspects of this doctrine ever since, and in most instances institutionalization of modifying measures has been accompanied by heated controversy.

It seems to me that underemployment and unemployment of resources are enough different from each other that each deserves some separate and special attention. In the frameworks I would prefer to use, unemployment is related to stability while underemployment is more related to growth. It is quite possible that allocation problems in the context of policies aimed at stability might be quite different from allocation problems in the context of policies aimed at growth.

Although I have disagreed with many aspects of Dawson's paper, I enjoyed reading it and having the opportunity to discuss it. This discussion is based on differences in our views with respect to the roles of economic theory, of economists, and of economists' value systems related to policy. I do not resent his views but I cannot agree with them. I assure Dawson that the statement of differences, however ineptly presented, is an honest one. And I hasten to add, in conclusion, that he is just as free to disagree with my views as I am with his.