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OUTLOOK '87

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ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C.



Outlook '87, Session 1

Tuesday, December 1, 1986

WELCOME TO OUTLOOK '87

Peter C. Myers
Deputy Secretary of Agriculture

Ewen, thank you for that really fine introduction. It really is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this 63rd Annual Outlook Conference. I know that many good friends are in the audience today.

The first outlook conference, Ewen, was held well before you and I were born, and I know you don't have any grey hairs either. The main purpose then was to disseminate economic and research findings to American farmers, and the main purpose today is the same. Of course, we really appreciate all of you that do an excellent job in disseminating the findings that we will present in the next few days.

I know that we have all of our good friends from the Embassies here today. It's understandable that other nations are concerned about our agricultural policy, and we really welcome all of you.

Looking back to 1923, times have changed and so has farming. In my own lifetime, in fact, I have seen some tremendous changes. But one thing that hasn't changed is the need of the American farmer for accurate, timely analysis of the short-range and the longer term prospects that influence supply and demand factors. Looking at this program today and for the next few days and seeing the excellent speakers, I think we are going to have a very good cross section of viewpoints on the outlook for both the short term and the long term.

I do plan to keep my comments brief this morning because it is certainly not necessary to dwell upon the importance of agriculture. Being a farmer myself, I am a bit prejudiced when it comes to this subject. I won't give you a lengthy discourse on the importance of agriculture to the U.S. economy, but as our first President once said with reference either to individual or national welfare agriculture is of primary importance. These words, which are carved in the stone over the entrance to this Department, are as valid today as they were when George Washington first said them. In recognition of that importance, this year's conference has been expanded to include more commodity sessions, as well as more time for participants to follow-up informally with conference speakers. I know I personally find that I learn the most when I get to talk one on one with somebody that has an issue or viewpoint that I am really interested in.

In addition to expansion of commodity sessions, speakers have been asked to focus on two themes: (1) the longer term prospects for U.S. agriculture in the late 1980's, and (2) the strategies for marketing farm commodities more effectively. It is especially important that we look at marketing as our farmers work to increase their net profits. Anytime a farmer can market more intelligently that's going to be net profit. The first theme will be highlighted at a special session this afternoon featuring a number of experts who probe the global forces shaping agriculture for the balance of this decade. The second theme recognizes that marketing strategies are rapidly becoming as important as production efficiencies. Hence commodity sessions and special sessions on agribusiness and export programs will sharpen the focus on marketing issues.

The conference comes at a critical time in agriculture. The momentum is building for renewed debate on farm policies in the Congress next year. This debate is going to surface with many different players, some of whom may not be quite as familiar to us. I think we are going to see urban Congressmen get involved in this debate. The level of rhetoric might even set an all-time record. Certainly, the analysis covered at this conference could play a key role in helping everyone better understand the forces that are at work today. We can not and, I repeat, we will not promise to solve all the dilemmas. We won't even guarantee to answer all your questions, but we will try. However, whether you are a newcomer to the Outlook Conference or a seasoned veteran, I feel that we will succeed if your imagination is stimulated and your intellect challenged.