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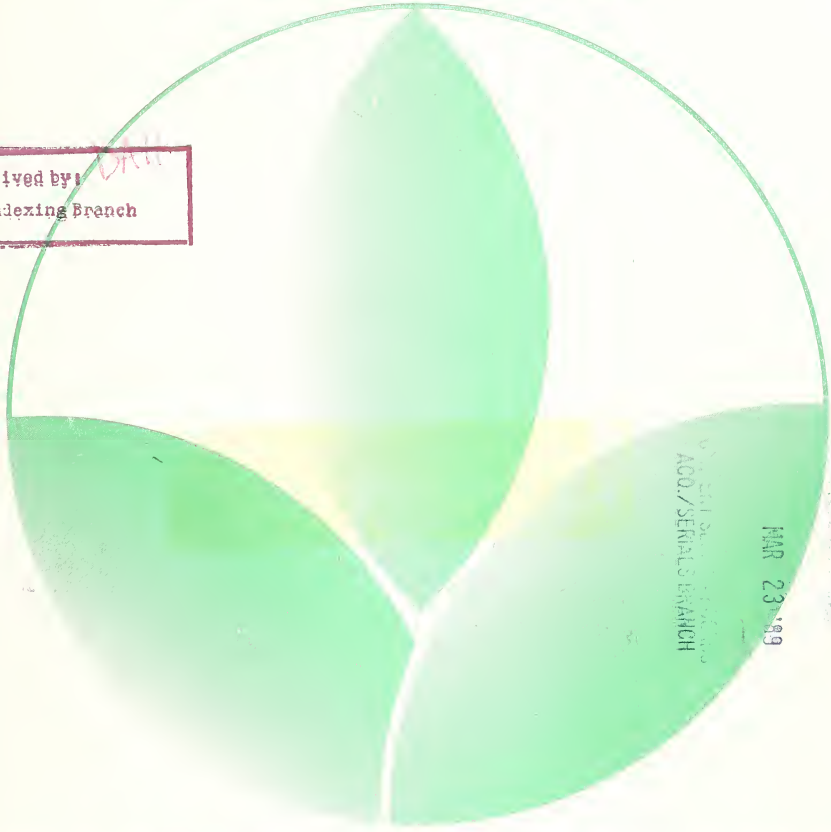
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OUTLOOK '89

65th Agricultural Outlook Conference
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C.
November 29 - December 1, 1988

ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C.



Outlook '89, Session #28

For Release: Wednesday, November 30, 1988

A FARMER'S VIEW

Dean R. Kleckner
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

I gather that I am to present my personal view of conservation implementation --as we look ahead to the new crop year.

In the opinion of this Iowa corn and hog farmer who had a pretty lousy crop year, the drought was tremendously disruptive to conservation programs along with everything else on the farm.

Further, that it will take a while before we can sort everything out and return to what we consider to be a normal operation.

You need to know that right now, one of the best, most accurate indications of farmer outlook, including the status of conservation compliance and the attitude toward the conservation reserve, is being put together by the thousands of farmers and ranchers who are taking part in Farm Bureau's annual policy development process.

I am speaking of the opinions and policy efforts of hundreds of thousands of operating farmers who have been reviewing dozens of topics of farm and ranch concern including soil and water conservation and federal farm programs.

The action began several months ago in group discussions and in county policy-decision meetings. The action continues at state Farm Bureau annual meetings where national policies are sorted out and moved on to the American Farm Bureau Federation.

In mid-December, the presidents of each state will gather in national session to review, compile, combine, edit and, sometimes debate the tentative national policies --including those on conservation compliance and reserve. Their report in the form of tentative resolutions, goes before our national House of Delegates in early January.

I have gone over a small sampling --about a dozen state policy reports that are the first to come in. One of these first reports is very conservation-specific. It states that conservation should receive the highest national priority. It notes that the primary responsibility for wise land management rests with those who own and operate the land. It adds that local units of government, assisted by state and federal agencies, can aid in the discharge of this responsibility.

Other conservation-specific state resolutions will soon follow. Together, they will make up one important facet of Federal farm program policy.

Already, in this small sampling, there is some indication that farmers will be asking for a longer term, five year farm program and that rather than seeking new and dramatically different policy, they will very probably reaffirm most of what we now have.

In general, this favors a market-oriented agriculture with supply and demand, rather than government action, ultimately determining production and price. The policy calls for relaxing the requirements for entry in the CRP for those farmers who are already using good soil conservation practices.

The way things look now, I suspect our delegate body will again ask for conservation compliance modifications to recognize economic and technical feasibility, tradition or normal farming practices, local conditions and other such factors.

I know of the reports showing that the half-way mark in developing conservation plans has been reached and, that things are pretty much on target for the end of 1989 compliance. Even so, farm support remains for extending the deadline for conservation compliance plan approval from 1990 to 1992, with implementation extended from 1995 to 1997.

The need for this was expressed by farm people before the drought that has since greatly complicated matters and has skewed the thinking of thousands of farmers who operate in parts of the country that normally receive an abundance of rain.

At the risk of repeating myself --although agriculture has always been filled with stress and uncertainty, this has been an exceptionally tough year for many farmers and ranchers. Like flood and fire, drought is an emotional event. Altogether, it has not been a good year in which to discuss conservation action or philosophy, especially with operators who see themselves just two steps away from total disaster.

The cries of extreme farm discomfort were clearly heard in Washington. For many, the congressional drought-aid package made the difference between survival or extinction. I stress that word, survival.

Survival, not a profit. And, lest we forget, profits are what keep people farming. Profits provide the respite necessary to allow conservation planning. Profits assure a future where such plans have meaning.

Farm Bureau's farm income study committee recognized the direct link between erosion control and improved net farm income. The committee has encouraged the use of lower cost conservation tillage practices --an action program Farm Bureau sponsors.

No-till, low-till, ridge-till, mulch-till, strip-till and reduced-till --all of the variations have their place in the nation's conservation system. The last I heard, farmers now use some form of conservation tillage on over 88

million acres. This is almost a two-million acre increase in conservation tillage use over last year's figures.

In the process, farmers are learning many new things; among them that conservation tillage does not necessarily boost pesticide use as was once thought. About the same amount of pesticide is needed as with conventional tillage.

Again, the drought has made it hard, or impossible to evaluate the growth and effectiveness of conservation tillage practices. Just about everyone agrees it was a tough year for first-timers.

Questions have been raised about whether some rather spectacular no-till failures were management problems instead of something inherently wrong with the concept. Or, maybe it was just too dry for seeds to germinate no matter what type of tillage was used. Studies are being done to determine what really happened.

The answers are important to everyone. Without question, the 1990 farm bill will address a number of conservation and environmental issues that have been built into farm program expectations and law.

I would ease the minds of those who see conflict here.

I see no conflict between a healthful and clean environment, clean air, clean water, uncontaminated soils... and a sound agricultural economy.

There can be some very real differences of opinion between what is perceived as safe and practical versus someone's version of perfection.

But, national agricultural policy and national environmental policy must complement each other.

Striking the proper balance is the trick.

No one, no matter how environmentally over-involved, truly wants to see a failing, unprofitable, unproductive American agriculture... driven to the wall by societal demands.

That's insanity and it simply is not going to happen.

Farmers, Farm Bureau members, support an appropriate balance between conservation concerns and production needs in any new farm legislation.

We must, and will, also work to develop our own conservation and environmental agenda to deal with these issues.