



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

DISEQUILIBRIA *Continued*

Charles D. Lambert, Orlen C. Grunewald, Paul L. Kelley, Barry L. Flinchbaugh, and Joseph Hajda on

The National Agricultural Policy Commission Act: The Kansan Connection

In an interview in the first 1987 issue of CHOICES Governor Carlin discussed the work of his Agricultural Policy Working Group and of the legislation that calls for establishment of a National Agricultural Policy Commission.

Charles Lambert and the other authors were active participants in the activities of the Governor's Working Group. They tell how it happened to be appointed, what it proposed, and how eventual legislation calling for a National Commission was passed.

The National Agricultural Policy Commission of 1985 represents a new concept in development of agricultural policy legislation. The Commission, established in the Food Security Act of 1985, was charged by Congress to analyze the structure, procedures, and methods of formulating and administering U.S. agricultural policies, programs, and practices. The Commission was also required to analyze conditions in rural areas of the United States and their relation to public service provided by federal, state, and local governments. This report describes how the concept of the Commission originated and how that concept was ultimately finalized in the Food Security Act of 1985.

1982 Crisis in Midwest

During the summer of 1982 the farm economy throughout the Midwest was experiencing severe hardship. Kansas Governor John Carlin, a former farmer,

The authors are members of the support group for the Kansas Agricultural Policy Working Group. Respectively they are research assistant, associate professor, professor, professor of Agricultural Economics, and professor of Political Science, Kansas State University, Manhattan.

became concerned that the agricultural financial situation was not temporary. He realized little could be done at the state level since the farm problem was a national issue. However, the Governor was then campaigning for reelection, and agriculture was certainly in the minds of his voting constituency. He therefore decided to include agricultural policy as part of his campaign strategy.

The Governor's initial farm policy meeting was attended by a small group of his staff and individuals from the private sector. Two views immediately surfaced concerning the Governor's campaign strategy. In the middle of a reelection campaign, in a predominately agricultural state, the Governor was pressured by one group to propose immediate partisan solutions to the farm problem. Others outside Carlin's staff argued that a more fundamental contribution to agricultural policy could be achieved by a nonpartisan approach. Governor Carlin accepted the latter approach and established the Kansas Agriculture Policy Working Group by Executive Order on September 16, 1982.

The Kansan Response

The Agricultural Policy Working Group included eight representatives from farming, banking, and agribusiness. Members were to be recognized leaders but not identified in an executive role with any particular interest group at the time of their appointment. A support group of agricultural economists and political scientists from Kansas State University and the University of Kansas was established by the Governor's Executive Order. A member of the Governor's staff attended Working Group meetings, and the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture served as an ex-officio member.

The Working Group was funded only for expenses through an annual appro-

priation within the Governor's executive budget. Salaries and expenses for the support group were underwritten by their respective state institutions.

The Working Group was charged to make recommendations to the Governor concerning:

—Needs, goals, aspirations and concerns of farmers and agribusiness persons.

—Marketing strategies, practices, and options.

—Current structure, statutes, regulations, and programs of both the Federal Government and the State of Kansas.

—Necessary involvement of the Governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Agriculture, the Kansas Department of Economic Development, universities under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Regents, other State agencies, and the private sector.

—Pertinent legislative and budget matters.

The Working Group's Work

The Working Group held a forum to hear views of various Kansas farm organizations, assess the agricultural situation and explore alternatives. Organization leaders were invited to visit individually with the Group, and many accepted. The chairman of the Working Group testified before agricultural committees of both Kansas legislative houses. These actions became important in legitimizing the Group, and obtaining political support for recommendations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The group concluded that *current agricultural policies are not working*. It found agricultural programs are drafted by officials elected to two, four, or six-year terms and managed by Secretaries of Agriculture with political appointments lasting a maximum of a presidential tenure. Resulting legislation is a patchwork of commodity specific-programs developed by commodity-specific congressional subcommittees pressured by special interest groups. Programs are complicated, sometimes mutually conflicting, and expensive.

The group suggested *several alternatives would work if they became long-term policies*. The support group presented the Working Group with analyses of 15 alternative policies ranging from no government programs to mandatory production controls. After thorough deliberation the Working Group determined that it was not going merely to propose another farm bill choosing among these alternatives.

Finally, the group found that *the ma-*

ior problem facing agriculture is instability resulting from domestic agricultural policies interacting in a world setting. The Working Group therefore decided to focus on the process and new institutions required to develop a long-term agricultural policy.

The Working Group recommended that a new institutional mechanism be established to develop long-term farm policy. Group members held a round table discussion with three distinguished agricultural policy specialists (Carroll Bottom, Willard Cochrane, and Luther Tweeten) to assess the political and economic feasibility of alternative institutional mechanisms to achieve long-term agricultural policy.

Why a Commission?

The instability and short-term nature of existing agricultural policy is primarily a function of the process by which decisions are made, rather than the programs themselves. The Working Group recognized there would be strong resistance by Congress, the executive branch, commodity organizations, and special interest groups to any new institutions threatening their role in the policy process. Therefore the Working Group proposed a new institution—a commission—to complement the roles of these organizations.

The Commission would be long term with members respected by all elements of the agricultural policymaking process. Grassroots contacts with primary agricultural organizations and the agribusiness complex would be established by the Commission. The primary purpose of the Commission would be to assess long-term policy alternatives and make recommendations among those to the President and the Congress.

From Working Group to Commission

Governor Carlin was reelected to a second term in 1982. During the campaign the Governor's Working Group became a focal point for discussion of the farm problem and agricultural policy issues. In keeping with his pledge to focus on long-term agricultural policy, the Governor extended the life of the Working Group for the duration of his term in office. Grassroots support among Kansas farm organizations increased the Group's commitment to improve the agricultural policymaking process. The Working Group was taken seriously by the press and the concept of long-term policy was adopted by numerous speakers on farm policy.

Carlin felt that it was time for him to begin promoting the Commission con-

cept at the national level. An opening came in October 1983, when he hosted the Midwestern Governors' Association. A major focus of that meeting was a dialogue on U.S. Agricultural Policy. During the session Governor Carlin and Nebraska Governor Robert Kerrey sponsored a resolution entitled "The Transformation of American Agriculture." The Midwestern Governors passed this resolution supporting creation of a quasi-independent mechanism, at the federal level, to develop the necessary stability and planning in the agricultural sector. Carlin was elected President of the National Governors' Association in the summer of 1984 and that organization endorsed the concept of a Commission as well.

While Carlin continued efforts through the Governors' Association, the Working Group met with Kansas Senators Robert Dole and Nancy Landon Kassebaum and Congressmen Dan Glickman and Pat Roberts, who were both members of the House Agriculture Committee. Their initial response to the proposed Commission was that past Congressional commissions had little success. The agriculture problem was too severe and politically important to delegate to a Commission.

The Working Group finally achieved support by convincing the Kansas Congressional delegation that a Commission could provide grassroots input and serve as a buffer between voters and the Congress in the development of national agricultural policy. The Kansas Congressional delegation subsequently worked through their respective committee assignments to garner support and endorsement of the proposal. The Working Group thus achieved sufficient political and grassroots support to include the concept of a Commission in the 1985 Farm Bill.

Although the National Agricultural Policy Commission Act of 1985 is now law, funding for the Commission has not been appropriated by Congress. December 1986 marked what was to be the first anniversary of the Commission and its first report to Congress. The President has not yet named members of the Commission.

Agricultural Working Group

Adrian Polansky, Belleville, Chairman
Dick Reinhardt, Erie
Jim Kramer, Hugoton
Norm Whitehair, Manhattan
Ron Sweat, Colby
Charles Hamon, Valley Falls
Jimmie Dean, Hutchinson and Harland Priddle, Secretary of Agriculture (ex-officio). ■