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Seeking a Better Way—With Visuals

By Daniel W. Sturt

The essence of democratic action is participation—participation by informed citizens attempting to arrive at solutions to the great variety of public problems with which they are faced. Our job as specialists is to help people to understand these problems, provide relevant information, and assist them in determining alternative courses of action.

In doing public policy extension we are, of course, always looking for more effective ways of accomplishing the job. Along with exploring new ways of using radio and television in our educational work, we have also explored new ways of visualization.

We have found large dramatic visuals particularly helpful in presenting a large amount of material to a group of several hundred in a limited amount of time. This is particularly true where only one meeting is possible. Even when working intensively with leaders in a series of meetings on a particular subject, these visuals have been most helpful. Visuals of this type not only create interest in themselves; they also help to emphasize the major points.

The following visuals are examples of the types which have been used in presenting information and in trying to stimulate thinking in various areas of agricultural policy—primarily agricultural price policy. While all of these aids have never been used for any one meeting, they are some of the aids which we have found useful. Material, color, design, and size all are important considerations. The emphasis here is upon design.

The agricultural situation of the past three years is sized up in these illustrations. Both visuals are on sign cloth and are examples of dramatizing a single point instead of trying to give many details in any one visual.

AGRICULTURAL INCOME DOWN

TOTAL INCOME

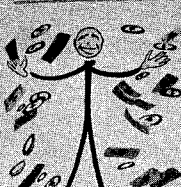
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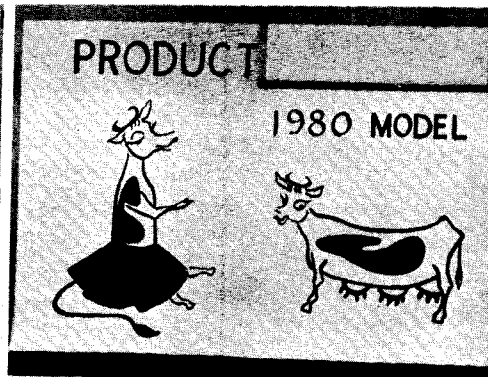
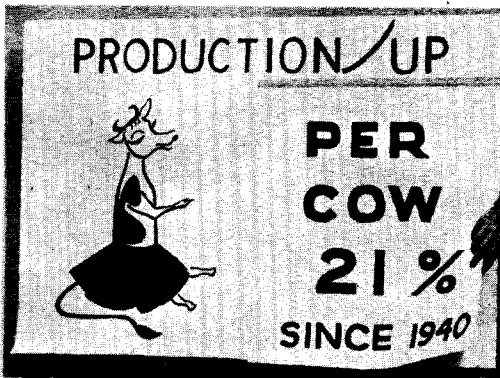


27% DOWN

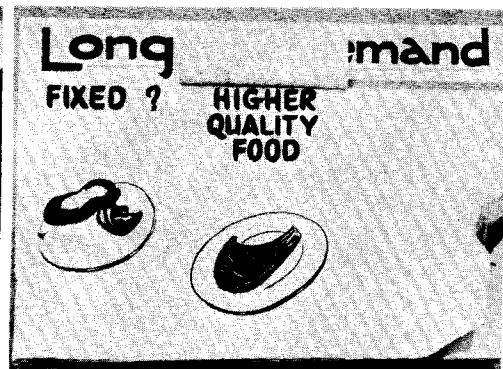
12% DOWN

PROSPERITY EVERYWHERE BUT IN AGRICULTURE



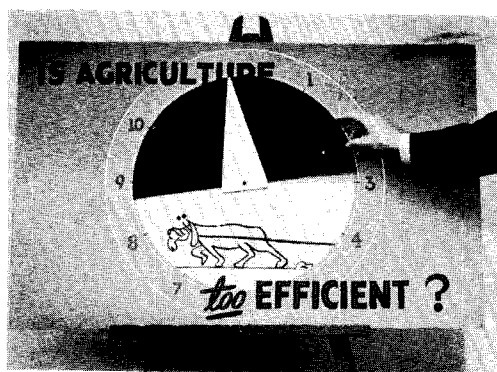
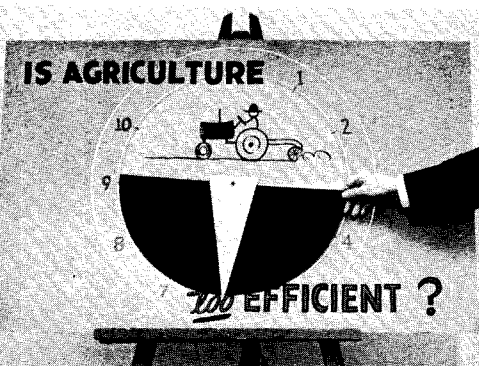


Included in the visuals devoted to the supply picture is this half-covered sign cloth chart showing the increase in production per cow since 1940. Emphasizing the importance of technology in promoting agricultural abundance and making an attempt at humor, the sign cloth flap is turned to show the 1980 version of "bossie."

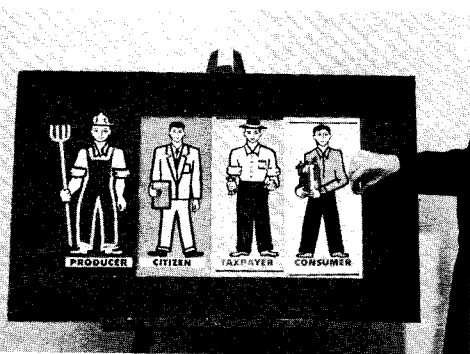
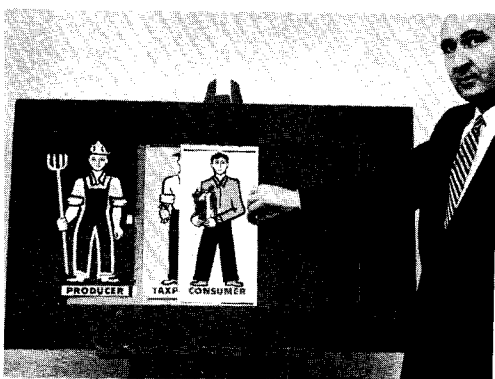
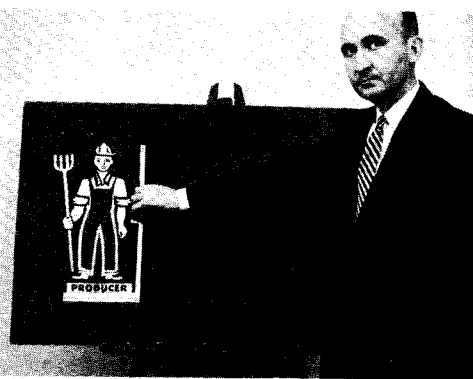


Using a similar technique in discussing the nature of the long-run demand for agricultural commodities, each sign cloth flap opens up a new area for consideration, i.e., the impact of increased protein diets and population growth on the long-run demand for farm products.





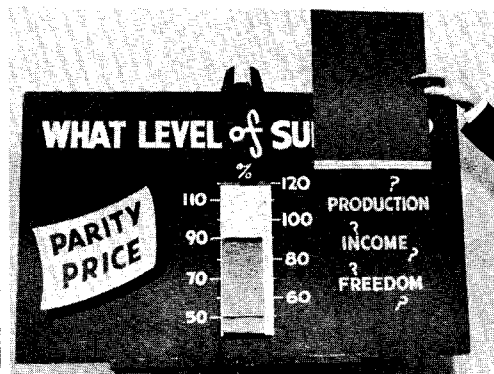
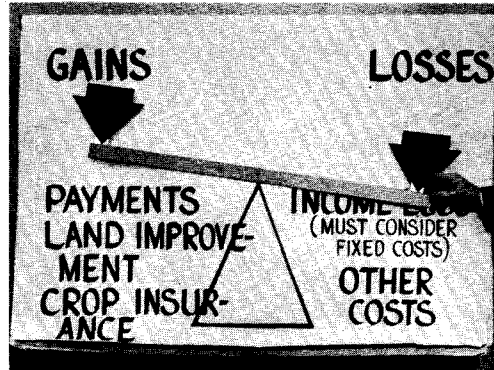
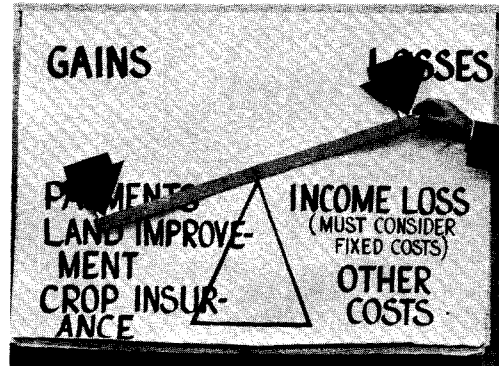
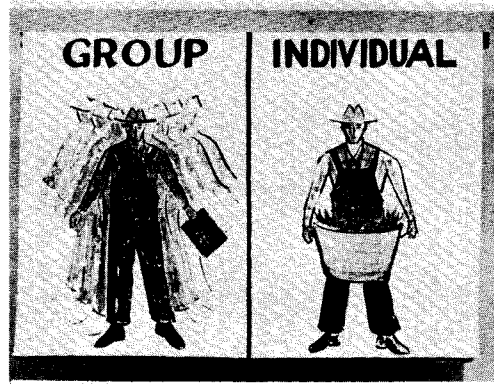
Some farmers feel that agriculture is too efficient. Should we turn the clock back on agricultural technology, or, at any rate, try to make the clock stand still? Farmers are asked to consider such things as: Is it possible? Is it in the public interest? Do farmers want to turn the clock back? How will farmers compete? Turning back the clock is visualized on cardboard by attaching a cardboard semi-circle in the center which, when moved backwards, covers the tractor and reveals the horse.

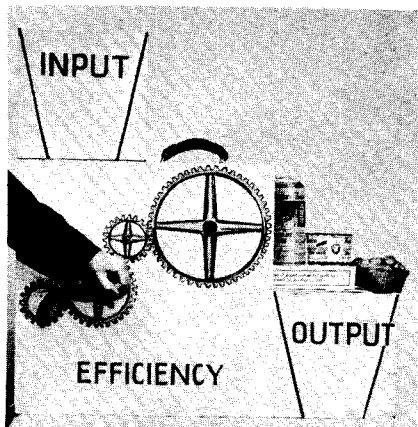
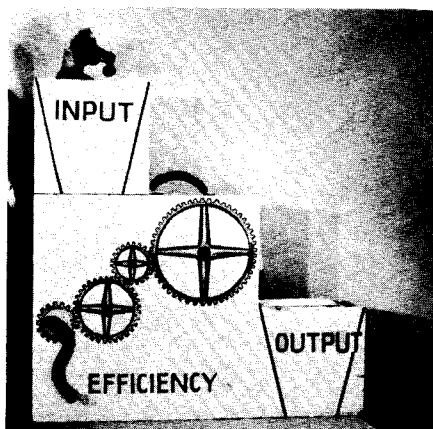


Why are you interested in agricultural price policy? You have a four-way stake in farm price programs: (1) as a producer, (2) as a consumer, (3) as a taxpayer, and (4) as a citizen. Attached to small tracks built into this cardboard visual are the four illustrations. Each picture slides out as it is discussed.

Another sign cloth visual is used to stress the difference between the individual's decision as a member of a group and as a private operator. As a member of a group you help decide farm policy. Once it has been decided, you make the managerial decisions on your farm which will benefit you and your family the most. For example, you may or may not favor the soil bank program. Regardless of this, you need to decide whether you will use it. This yardstick attached at the center on a sign cloth base moves up and down to dramatize the importance of weighing the expected gains against the expected losses.

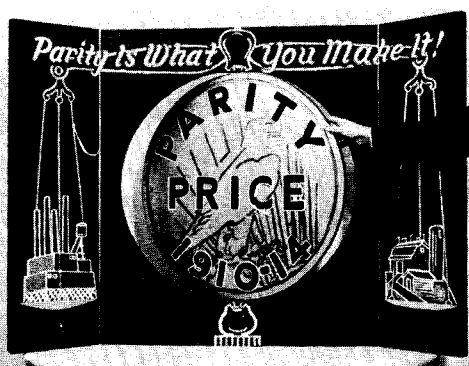
But public policy is concerned essentially with those decisions which you help make as a member of the group. A major decision is the level of price support. At what level should farm prices be supported? This question is posed by a barometer-like cardboard visual on which a circular red and white ribbon rotates up or down to indicate the level of support. A cardboard flap on the side, when raised, suggests three of the many factors which should be taken into consideration in making a decision on the level of support.

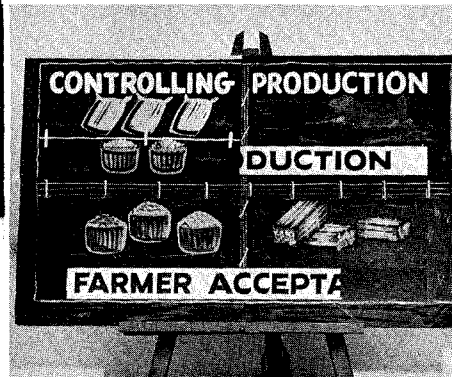
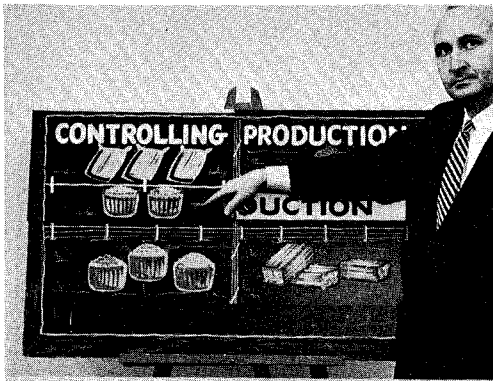
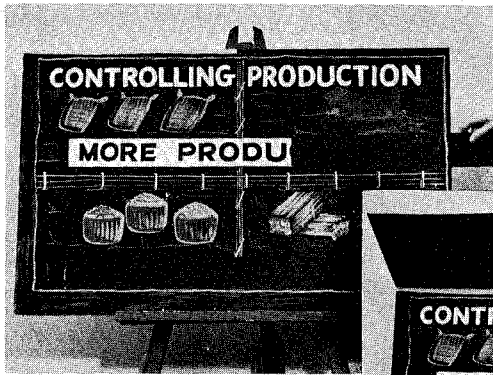




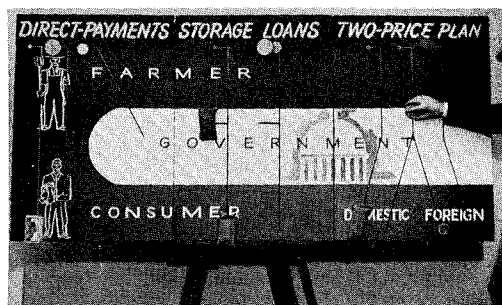
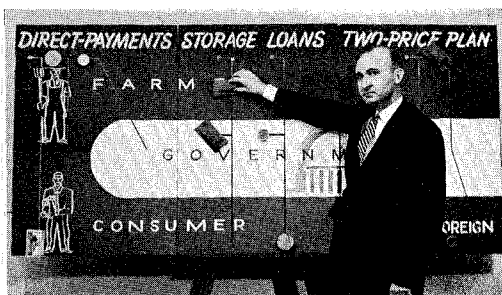
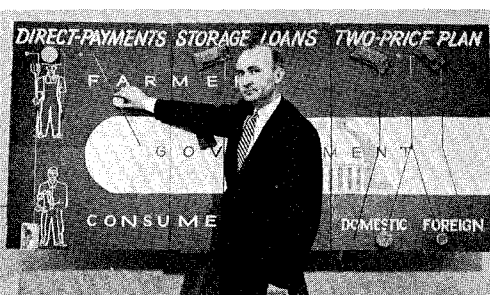
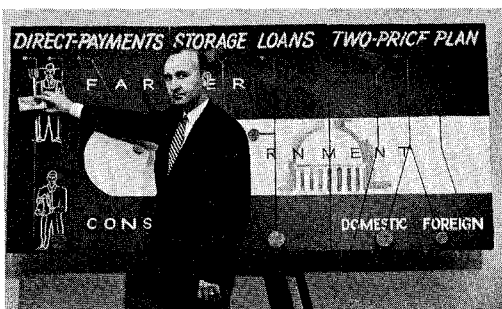
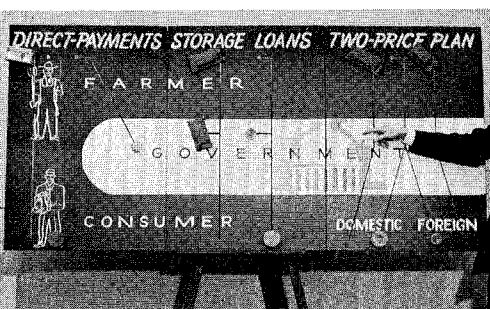
Another factor to consider in deciding the level of support is the effect of that level on agricultural efficiency. The efficiency concept in the total agricultural economy is demonstrated by using a box-like "machine" into which we put the assets of the national agricultural plant—such items as land, labor and management, machinery, buildings, and capital. A turn of the crank causes a variety of food products to flow forth. Efficiency here is concerned essentially with a minimum input and maximum output—output being measured in terms of consumer satisfactions.

The measuring stick for price-support levels is the percentage of parity. There is much confusion in the minds of the people as to what parity is. The coin which is the center of this large wooden visual spins to symbolize this confusion. Further examination of this coin shows that parity is, in a way, a two-faced coin. On the one side is "parity prices," on the other, "parity income." This serves as a basis for developing more fully the parity concept, including its weaknesses and its strengths.

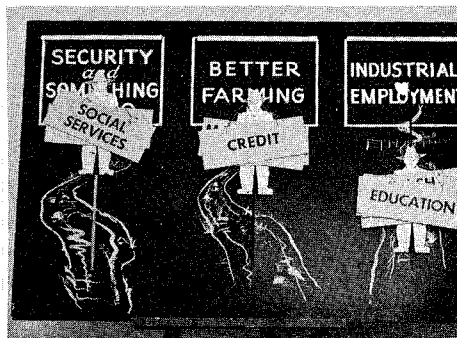
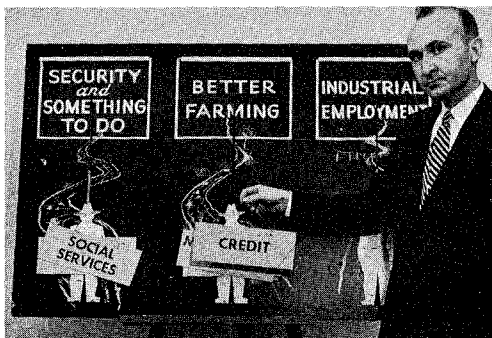
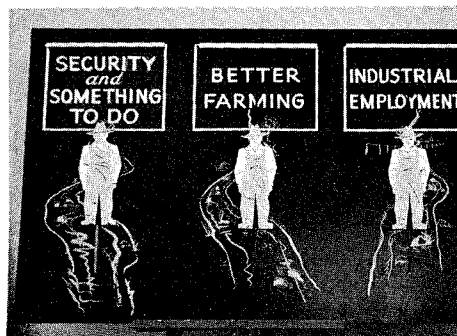
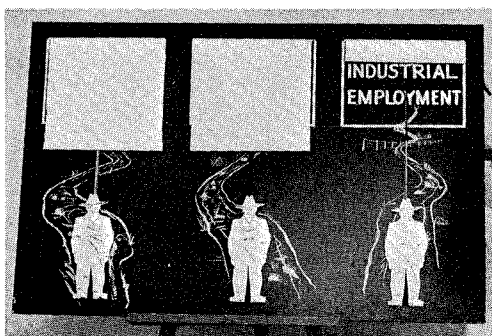




If you decide that farm prices in the long run should be guaranteed at levels above those of the free market, you are faced with another decision, how shall production be controlled? This cardboard strip chart points out that efforts to control production in the past have simply resulted in more being produced. With acreage controls the same amount of grain is produced on less acres, leaving the additional acres for production of other crops, as is indicated by the cardboard flap which swings over from the back of the visual to show what happens after acreage controls are instituted. Farmer acceptance is also an important consideration.



Another decision that must be made is what method or methods shall be used to guarantee a given level of prices. This large fiber-board visual, which folds together for easy handling, shows how direct payments, storage loans, and the two-price plan work. Small coins of different sizes, butter cartons, and small bags of grain are mounted in such a way as to move freely along the slots on the board from producer to consumer, government to producer, etc. The first illustration points out the role of government in each method. The second illustration shows the butter moving from producer to consumer, while the third shows government making a payment directly to the producer. Next we see grain moving into government storage where storage loans are used. In the last two illustrations the grain is split between two markets and sold at two different prices.



One of our major public problems is the large number of underemployed farmers in agriculture. By and large these farmers are subsistence farmers who have neither kept pace with new developments in farming, nor have made the transition from agriculture to industry. This visual is devoted to spelling out their goals and objectives and how they can be helped to help themselves. Three types of subsistence farmers—each with different goals—are shown on this fiberboard visual. As discussed, the goal of each group is shown by pulling the canvas cover down in back. By pulling the attached strings of the visual, the puppet-like “farmers” move from where they are to where they want to be.

But we do not push people around in a democracy, so we release the strings and leave the “farmers” at the base of the visual. We must create the kind of environment in which these subsistence farmers can help themselves. After discussing each type of assistance, i.e., credit, education, health, etc., and placing a card symbolizing this assistance on the puppet “farmer,” the string which moves the “farmer” to his goal is pulled. Finally, many things having been done to assist these underemployed farmers, we find the last group of “farmers” moving to the top of the visual.