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**IMPLEMENTING AN EXPANDED FOOD AND
NUTRITION POLICY:
A FARMER'S POINT OF VIEW**

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My assignment was to react to the speakers on the program from a farmer's point of view. I'll try to indicate where I agree or disagree, and make some additional points about implementing an expanded food and nutrition policy. In stating my opinions, I admit my bias — I'm the head of a firm that is organized to make a profit, and I'm not going to apologize for my position. I'm not ashamed that I'm in business to make money.

Another comment that I'd like to make — I've been on programs before with some people from the consumer advocate movement. Do they always speak and run? Our nutritionists here, I'm sure, would tell us not to eat and run. So I'd like for the consumer representatives to stay around for the whole program. They know what they're doing, but they might learn a little from us, too!

Now, in response to the issues. I heartily agree that agricultural policy should move toward food and nutrition policy. However, I disagree as to who should control this policy. I submit that, if production agriculture has in fact controlled ag-policy in the past, the consumer has profited most from this control. And what farmers worry about for the future is not whether policy moves to combine food and nutrition concerns, but who controls the agenda and how fast it moves.

This morning, I heard that a consumer-be-damned food policy is a luxury the U.S. can't afford. Neither can farmers afford the luxury of this kind of a food policy. We want stability the same as Mr. Crowder's firm wants stability. We cannot afford a boom and bust agricultural economy. I favor the limited reserve program that came in with the last Food and Agriculture Act. I have no quarrel with that.

But I also think that a farmer-be-damned food policy is something that the consumers and industry cannot afford either. It would

probably be more dangerous than the other. In the long run, activities like the beef boycott several years ago will hurt those very consumers who were protesting. I'm convinced, from what's happened to our cattle industry, that the beef cycle will go a lot lower than it might have had not that activity taken place a few years ago. Coupled with other things such as the price freeze, conditions were triggered that we will pay for over the next few years. I think that consumers are going to be embarrassed with how short the hamburger supply is going to be, and how high priced it might get. I'm afraid we'll lose markets that will be many, many years coming back. We'll probably change the eating habits of a lot of people because of scarce hamburger.

For example, my plans at home a few years back were to increase my holdings to 500 brood cows to utilize the refuse from the corn and bean crop and graze the second class land scattered throughout our farm. The events of the past few years have caused me to reduce my goal to 300 cows. I've since backed off to 250. My decision is made. We're getting out of the cattle business. It's only a matter of when. Naturally, we're not getting out of it with the cycle coming into the present phase. But I've seen public policy really kick the cattlemen around, and I think it will happen again.

I heard the usual reference to saving the family farm this morning. This should not be part of a new food and nutrition agricultural policy. The small family farm problem is a rural development and people problem and not an agriculture problem. I think that the last couple of programs have slanted in this direction, but not fast enough. I do not think that special USDA policies are the best way to save the family farm or make it possible for family farms like mine to grow. I think tax policies are more important. Tax problems can readily break up family farms.

If we want the family farm to flourish, we'd also better keep a strong Land-Grant system. As long as the Land-Grant system is pumping free research and free information to firms like mine, we'll compete with any other type of farming structure. This morning we mentioned past research as favoring commercial agriculture, and the usual statement of its objective — make two blades of grass grow where one did before.

This is true, but I think we in the Land-Grant system and commercial agriculture ought to be careful in apologizing for the benefits which have come out of that system. A good example — and we can pick many — were the pork chops we ate last night. They are not the same pork chops that we would have eaten 15 years ago. The Land-Grant system guided pork production in that direction, along with dual grading and a lot of other quality breakthroughs. The consumer benefited, not commercial agriculture.

I think we should have started with another thing that was not addressed this morning. A moral issue that keeps popping up all the

time in our media is “food for people, not for profit.” Do we, as Americans, have the basic right to eat at a price we think is reasonable? I submit to you that we no more have that right than I, as a farmer, have a right to make a living on the farm, or you as educators have a right to a certain salary. If that’s the route that we’re going to take, we need a complete set of values for our whole system, and I don’t think anybody’s emphasizing or advocating that.

Strangely, another very important area was omitted in the emphasis placed on food and nutritional policy, although it was alluded to by Mr. Crowder. Agriculture’s role has changed. It’s not just a matter of feeding people, but also supporting the economy. Any agricultural policy in the future has to be heavily weighted to the export market, the balance of payments, and the support of the dollar. That almost has to be one of the chief criteria of any future policy.

Another thing that hasn’t been talked about is the tie between energy policy and agriculture policy. The land I have is actually a big solar collector. The inputs that go into my land are different from the land west of me. They have to pump water onto it. The water that falls on my land makes it much more valuable relative to much of the land in the world that is irrigated. In the long run, expensive energy is bullish for Cornbelt agriculture. That has to be considered when we’re talking about agriculture and food policy.

Seemingly, agricultural programs and policies in the past have had the purpose of supporting the farmer, especially the family farmer. Has this really been the case? I submit that the real purpose of agricultural programs and policies has been to support and strengthen the whole agricultural economy. Hence, keep the whole economy strong. If I look back at the policies in my productive lifetime, they can be boiled down to having actually supported land values.

It is very important to keep basic land values sound in order to keep the lending institutions, and a great part of the economy, sound. It was easy to see this during the most recent policy debates about where to set target prices and so forth. They pegged my Cornbelt land at a floor of \$1,000 to \$1,200 an acre. That’s what the program was all about.

Now for nutrition. I agree that nutrition should have a major policy role — an increasing role. But the discussion this morning reaffirmed my fear that we’re not ready. The evidence from research is not ready to play a major role in decisions on food policy in the near term. And I’m frightened that policy will go too far without an adequate information base. We farmers get very frustrated with the mixed, so-called facts, research, and statistics that the nutrition and the medical profession use to evaluate our product and our futures. You can cite all kinds of studies that show that foreign populations do not have the health problems that we do. But do we really know?

We’re the hardest working people in the world and we’re under the most stress. How do you sift out diet from the stress that we put

ourselves under? I was all primed to blame the medical profession for part of the nutrition problems. But then I recalled a conversation I had with my family doctor a few years ago. He told me how short he was on nutritional information. In comparing our college courses, this old farmer that graduated in ag-econ had more nutritional background than that M.D. That's really frightening, because I know very little about nutrition.

The other thing that I just can't help but bring up is that excessive food intake keeps topping the list of nutrition problems. Will education effectively limit our excess food intake? We could do it economically, but we all hope that's not going to happen. Maybe USDA should be doing some crash research on coming up with some kind of a food additive that will just plainly make food less efficient so we can all eat and enjoy ourselves.

More seriously, I feel that we need national emphasis on nutrition research and nutrition education. I know that most of you here cringe when you hear talk of crash programs, because I know how it affects your business. However, it's long overdue, and I heard all morning long that we just don't have a long time to get more money and more programs in nutritional research. We should be spending our tax money — yes, even some of those food stamp dollars — on education programs designed for better nutrition, perhaps especially aimed at the people on food stamps.

Television is one way to get to many people. I would much rather see money spent to train consumers rather than feed consumers. You ought to rise to the challenge of making education more important than giving food away as an objective of the new food and nutrition based agricultural policy.

Along those lines, there are many ways to do it other than direct tax dollars. How about tax incentives or tax breaks to food corporations, such as Mr. Crowder's, to use appropriate advertising to get this message across? Surely the Extension Service should play the key role. I'm afraid it won't, but in my opinion, it should. But we've got to feel a need for it.

I must respond to the statement Ellen Haas made that she thought that 10% was too much for food to go up. I sure agree, but if my costs are up 10%, then food should go up 10% also. She also blamed the middleman as the problem, never the farmer. Last week when the network news picked up on the labor problem in the northern Ohio tomato industry, it was not those nice farmers out there that were blamed — it was the bad guys in between. But we know it doesn't work that way. Any pressure on middlemen or processors comes right back to the farmer. That's just inherent in the system.

To summarize my views as a commercial farmer, I think that farm policy makers should innovate and move in new directions. One thing we can be sure of is that the past, time-tested programs that

probably have worked poorly at best will not work in the future, not in the changing world society that we're operating in now. And yes, I think consumers and the economic trade factor should have more input into agricultural policy.

Perhaps we need to look at turning the emphasis around. If the consumer wants more power in food policy, we must approach farm controls — subsidies, whatever you want to call them — from the livestock point of view and let that filter back to corn, rather than to try to control the agricultural economy from feed grains, wheat, and cotton. I doubt that we'll ever teach consumers why we have to support a farmer out there growing corn. So we have opportunities to turn things around and approach it from a different angle.

Another thing that I have noticed throughout the Cornbelt is that we have a serious problem with the livestock farmer. I am concerned in the long run that we're going to lose a lot of our livestock producers. Then we won't have that corn market I so badly need, looking at it from a selfish point of view. I think there's been a real change in lifestyle in midwestern farming.

Witness what's happened to hog prices. Those few big hog producers keep right on doing well. And that big glut in hog numbers that you have all been forecasting for the last several years just keeps not appearing. This reflects a change in lifestyle that is hard to measure. The Cornbelt farmer is going out of the livestock business.

When you travel across Indiana and Illinois, the barns are closed, the fences are gone, and weed problems have just about vanished on some of those good midwestern farms. They're really spoiled, especially the farm wife who has enjoyed the luxury of no cows, pigs, and chickens around the place. She's going to be awfully slow to go back to livestock. It's going to take some tremendous financial incentives to get the Midwest farmer to be a part-time livestock producer again. It certainly will in our operation. I would accept it a lot quicker than my boys. They read my P & L statement and say, "Dad, why are we messing around with cows?" And they have a good point.

Another concern most farmers have is the surveillance of agricultural chemicals, drugs, and feed additives. We're really concerned that we're stifling research and development. From talking to farmers in other countries, I quickly find that the chemicals they're using are coming out of Europe. It's very much easier for a chemical or drug company to get a product developed in Europe than here or someplace else. What concerns me is that first we won't have chemical breakthroughs. It doesn't affect me that much if I don't have these innovations, because my domestic competitors don't either. However, the thing that's hurting the most is the fact that my foreign competitors do have this advantage. It's the one thing that irks

me the most when we talk about the need to participate in the world market, while putting shackles on our ability to do so.

Speaking of administration programs — this conference is supposed to be about policy and its administration — the administration of the program this year was very poor. They kept putting off and changing the rules and changing the rules. They're going to have a time with us next year. We're just going to wait and wait, I just don't want to operate in that kind of a market.

Okay, I've pretty well covered the list. I thank you for the opportunity to present at least one farmer's point of view. And don't be afraid to take me on, because you'll get my opinion, right or wrong.