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AN ACTION PROGRAM FOR THE RURAL AGED

Talk by Don Hayworth
Specialist in Aging

at the 41st Annual Agricultural Outlook Conference
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The Federal Council on Aging was established by President Eisenhower in 1956. Much of its activity centered around plans for the White House Conference on Aging of January 9-12, 1961. This ambitious undertaking provided the most important milestone thus far in the nation's developing field of gerontology.

In preparation for this conference thousands of meetings were held throughout the nation. Delegates sent by Governors and by organizations numbered two thousand five hundred, and included leading authorities on the subject. Thick volumes from the various states reported their activities and interests in aging. In many divisions of the field, such as in medicine and employment and housing, experts put together background papers that still provide valuable sources of basic information.

Soon after the White House Conference, President Kennedy established the President's Council on Aging. This provides a meeting ground for such departments and agencies as Health, Education and Welfare, Housing and Home Finance, Agriculture and Labor to prevent overlapping and to channel information about their various programs where it can be useful. It also keeps the President informed of administrative and legislation needs in aging.

Much has been done in this field by the Department of Agriculture. In almost every state Extension workers in Home Economics have been active over the years. Homemakers Clubs have been greatly interested in the study of aging. Many excellent publications have been issued by Extension agents. The Farmers Home Administration has made many loans and grants in the field of rural housing, with special consideration for those over 62. The Department has provided surplus foods for Senior Citizen centers. As a member of the President's Council on Aging the Department has been constantly in touch with the many developing federal programs, but until recently no one in the Department was charged with this as his chief responsibility.

Today the Department is prepared to give new and additional leadership. We can arrange for specialists to go into states and counties to help local staffs develop activity in the field of aging; we can encourage consideration of the subject by Extension leaders; we can pick up successful ideas in rural aging and circulate these ideas to other communities; we can coordinate national programs of aging as they relate to rural areas; we can stimulate those who are developing national programs in aging to keep rural areas in mind; we can provide leadership and encouragement through printed materials.

It is in behalf of this kind of program that I am coming before you today. Let me tell you what we hope will come about in rural areas as far as aging programs are concerned. We hope each county--although county lines might not always be followed--will have a group of leaders giving systematic attention to problems of aging. This group might be called a Council on Aging. We think of some fourteen separate programs, each of which might be developed by a committee, and covering such subjects as housing, nursing homes, providing part-time employment, and setting up a friendly visiting program.

Some people say families ought to take care of their own elderly. This is true. But this doesn't mean we should refuse to take care of our neighbor's elderly in case our help is needed.

It doesn't mean that the community's families should refuse to cooperate in problems of aging. We're suggesting they should cooperate. If a community doesn't have a decent nursing home--and there are many such communities--we think it makes sense for community leaders to get together and plan such a facility. People who don't think we should

have community activity of this kind are trying to shape our institutions by the facts of life as they were known in a previous age. There have been times in the history of man when generation after generation lived in the same area--almost like a forest growing out of decayed and fallen trees from whose very acorns the living trees once sprouted. But today children are likely to leave their home communities, and retired parents are often condemned to lives of loneliness.

Of the fourteen kinds of activities a community might undertake in problems of aging, one of the most **helpful** is housing. At first thought one might assume that a person either has his own home or goes to a nursing home. It's not that simple. Unfortunately, in many nursing homes in rural communities we find those who are intellectually and socially alert, thrust among those in the last stages of pitiable senility. We see people kept at great expense in hospitals when they could better be living in a foster home with a minimal amount of help.

We may classify seven different kinds of living arrangements for older people, beginning with the normal home situation in which the couple, or an individual is entirely self-sufficient. Then there's the group resident facility with a common dining room. Each individual or couple has a room or apartment, going and coming as they wish, but eating with the entire group. Then we have foster home care, with not more than three or four older people, and usually only one, living in a home

Committee Jobs in Rural Aging
<p>Employment Housing Needs Volunteer Activity Nursing Homes Health Referral Centers Senior Clubs Service Centers Friendly Visiting Transportation Adult Education Homemaking Services Pre-Retirement Counseling Attitudes Toward Aging</p>

with another family--eating with them and taking part in normal family activities. Next there's a home for the aged, with house rules and limits on activities. This would include people who are, for the most part, self-sufficient, but are forgetful and generally dependent. Then there's the true nursing home for bedridden patients, and of course, there's the typical hospital for acute cases of a temporary nature. And last is the geriatric hospital for terminal cases.

Kinds of Living Situations for Older People
Normal, Self-sufficient Home
Group Residence (Common dining room)
Foster Home
Home for Aged (House rules & limits)
Nursing Home (Bed-ridden patients)
Hospital (Acute, temporary cases)
Geriatric Hospital (Terminal cases)

Now I submit that in every community, rural as well as metropolitan, there's need for each of these facilities. Certainly in each ten thousand of population, which ten thousand would include a thousand people over 65, there's need for at least one unit each of these seven kinds of living arrangements. Moreover, in every community are resources to provide such facilities. But how many communities have even half of these. You'll ordinarily find a general hospital and a nursing home, and that's all.

Not only do we need one each of the seven kinds of living arrangements, but we need some option in levels of living. A person with a substantial income should be able to buy superior service. So a community might well have a nursing home for those who are willing to pay four or five thousand dollars a year as well as for indigents. There, likewise, should be a group residence facility with the kind of atmosphere enjoyed by those with professional and intellectual backgrounds as well as residence facilities for those with more limited backgrounds.

We all want to approach retirement with some assurance we can live in dignity and security. But if there's no existent satisfactory facility we can do little about it. If, when people can no longer live satisfactorily in their own homes they have no choice but to go to a shabbily run nursing home, there's little they can do with their savings to make life more pleasant. They might, of course, go elsewhere in the state but moving to another community often presents difficulties and has little attraction.

It might seem fantastic to assume that an impoverished county could afford all these varied facilities for their elderly. But a shrewd and hardworking committee on housing can achieve these goals. In the first place they can get federal help in building many of these--all the way from an insured loan to a complete grant. Hill-Burton funds may be used for some of them; Farmers Home Administration, Community Facilities Administration, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Federal

Housing Administration, the Public Housing Administration offer help. If a Council on Aging sets up a committee on Housing, it can locate federal resources that will make such a program possible.

Of course, the community should provide its own significant contribution. The payments of individuals using these facilities will normally carry interest charges and eventually retire the debt.

Part of the job of organizing a successful program of this kind depends on alert sponsorship. Take the possibility of developing foster home care for the elderly. First of all homes need to be found that would like the added income and are equipped physically and socially to accept additional members of the household. Then those in need of this kind of situation must be appropriately paired with corresponding households.

The key to success in any community program in housing lies in the quality of local leadership. That's what Extension can help to furnish. You, as individual Extension workers, can't single-handedly develop housing programs in your individual counties, nor can you, as state leaders, throw this responsibility on County Home Economics Agents. What you can do, together with your County Agents, is to locate one or two dedicated individuals who will help you round up a group of leaders, so that the county will have an organization to do this kind of thing. Eventually they will take the lead, and you can be released to other points of usefulness.

Last, I want to point out a job which needs to be done, and which is basic to the whole problem of aging in this country, but which no one has undertaken to attack specifically, and that's to change the concept of aging. All our attitudes toward aging and aged people are the result of training. We pick up these attitudes from the society in which we live--just as we pick up attitudes toward other races, or as we learn social attitudes of honesty.

It may be of no help at this point to try to explain why the Chinese have long held their elders in such high respect. Or why we Americans, on the other hand, try so desperately to retain our youth. We all know it's rather silly but we've been taught to feel it's a great compliment to be told we appear ten years below our chronological age.

This worship of youthfulness has probably been developed to a higher point in America at this time than among any other people or in any other period of history. Old age is considered shameful. For this old age has but itself to blame. It was the older people themselves who taught the younger generation to hold this kind of attitude.

My proposal is that we do something about it. If I were to say we could solve this by appointing a committee I might be greeted with a derisive laugh. The development of a social attitude can't be legislated. It can't be blueprinted. It can't be bought. It's like the air around us. Forever there, forever powerful, but defying a manipulation.

On the other hand a committee can do something about it. I enjoy classic architecture--great buildings, magnificent columns, masses of marble, beautiful design. And the reason I do is that I had a good Latin teacher. The Latin book had impressive pictures of Roman buildings. She drew our attention to those buildings, and I thought how wonderful it would be if I could see them. So when I've been in Rome or Raleigh, North Carolina, in Ankor Wat, Cambodia or Burlington, Vermont I enjoy walking around buildings I admire. My wife doesn't understand how I can spend so much time in a cathedral. The explanation is that I had a Latin teacher who planted an attitude.

If several times during a child's experience in grade school he hears pointed observations as to the value of older people's good judgment and the respect we should have for their experience, if in high school the social science teacher develops thoughtful discussion of potential contributions provided by older people as well as the respect they deserve, with some students this might very well sink home.

Supplement this with occasional articles and editorials in the county newspaper, plus discussions over local television. You see I'm getting around to the idea that a committee might manipulate these molders of public opinion. This same committee could go to the local ministers and suggest that sermons be preached--trying to set forth sensible attitudes toward aging. The woman's club might give over a program to this consideration--or the Kiwanis Club. And the Homemakers Clubs, as many of them already have, could take up the subject.

Of course, the odds are against us--what with national television and magazines, books and radio, in constant praise of youth and oblique disparagement of age--but the success of propaganda isn't always determined by the loudest voice. Given half a chance the socially honest answer likewise has great persuasiveness.

I hope you agree with me that a committee on Housing for the Elderly and a Committee for Changing the Concept of Aging have worthy functions to perform in the states and communities you represent. You surely can verify the need for these out of your own experience--your own families, the older people you know, and the neighborhoods in which you live.

If you do agree with me, I further hope you'll agree that there should be established in counties a Council on Aging to set up these two committees I've mentioned as well as the other twelve kinds of committees that fall within the province of such a Council.

If you do so agree, you as community leaders and as leaders of community leaders may be able to find ways of weaving this into your activities, to the end that we can spread wherever Extension goes--and that's all of rural America--a program of practical helpfulness for older Americans. Not that we want merely to do our missionary work for the pitifully helpless, but that while we're working, and while we have the strength to build, we create for our own future selves a kind

of environment that will be continually fruitful and enjoyable. For you to do what you can today for the security of others is the soundest kind of insurance you can take out for yourselves.

I'm only one awkward, new recruit in this awe-inspiring, far-reaching Department of Agriculture which perhaps has done more to change the life of rural people than any other single institution in the history of man.

As only one person I can make no significant contribution except thru you and other Extension workers. It's my hope that you'll accept this challenge and that the boys and girls with whom you work today will have a more pleasant and more meaningful old age than have most of their grand parents today.

