



"Why the Farmer?"

Public Speaking Contest Manuscript

of

Todd Harrell

Livingston F F A Chapter

1991

A Midwest farmer stands staring at a new tractor on an equipment yard. He thinks to himself, "This here is a fine piece of equipment and it sure would outdo that old tractor at the house, but it's so expensive. I guess the old one will just have to do for another year."

A salesman walks onto the yard and asks, "Can I help you?"

"No," says the farmer. "I was just looking."

Why the farmer? Why? Throughout the history of this nation farmers have been America's backbone, the basis of it's economy. But since the mid 1980's, the American farmer has seen some very hard times. Not since the Great Depression have there been so many farm closures. *(1) It's time for the United States government to take action instead of "just looking".

The source of the collapse of the American farm economy can be attributed to several factors. Rising farm costs, falling farm prices and plunging farm exports are the result of a massive federal budget deficit, high interest rates and a still high dollar. All of these problems center around one group of people, our lawmakers. Now, in the midst of a recession, *(2) it is time to bring the tragic plight of the American farmer to the forefront and not just set it on the back burner.

The problems caused by lawmakers didn't just recently begin, they have been around a long time and have finally piled up high enough to break the back of almost every farmer in America.

Politicians have made four embargoes in the last fifteen years, causing a **drastic** cut in the farmer's exports. *(3) When President Richard Nixon imposed the first embargo, it cut off a major portion of Japan's food supply. Subsequently, Japan turned to Brazil where they invested billions of dollars in order to boost the output of soybeans in that country. Japan vowed to never again depend on the United States for its food supply. The last embargo imposed on Russia **was a severe blow** to the farmer. It caused **massive** grain surpluses to mount up, and for what? **Nothing.** Our government didn't starve the Russians out of Afghanistan; we only starved our own farmers out of another market. The Russians turned to other countries and put more money into becoming more self-sufficient.

Instead of developing programs **to help the farmer,** the government has actually been **hurting him.** The Gramm-Rudman Act truly put a strain on the American farmer. The law, which was intended to balance the budget, called for a 4.3 percent reduction in domestic spending which caused a 1.26 billion dollar cut in aid to already troubled farmers. *(4) To add to the trouble, massive farm foreclosures were already being carried out by the Farmers' Home Administration. What this type of policy ignores is the **value** of the individual family farm in terms of community support and local business. The policy also disregards the value of the practical knowledge of the family

farmer, who in most instances can solve many of his problems with a little governmental help. But lately the help and support hasn't been there for the farmer.

As anyone can see, the American government must make a choice to either save the farmer or plummet further into debt because of the situation of the farmer. The government must realize that when it hurts the farmer, it hurts itself; because food is not the only thing the farmer produces. For every farm job there are also five other jobs that depend on the welfare of the farmer. *(5) And with massive layoffs in many of these jobs such as steel and automotive industries, the government must find the root of the problem. That root unmistakably lies in the problems of our nation's farmers.

Don't misinterpret, the federal government isn't the only cause of the farm crisis, the competitive spirit of the American farmer also played a part in his downfall. In the late 1970's and early 1980's everything seemed to be going well for the farmer so he decided to expand. And expand he did, small farmers bought up larger and larger sums of land all the while building up an even larger debt. As the "new paint disease" took hold, farmers were buying much new equipment when older, but adequate models were all that were needed. *(6) The American farmer has always been a very aggressive businessman, but as one can also see, he can also be a very careless one, too. Unlike the govern-

ment, farmers took hold of the situation and carefully constructed a plan to eliminate their debt as best they could. Farmers began using new techniques such as no-till farming and began more efficient management practices with computer technology in order to reduce the costs on the farm.

The United States government **must** help farmers in their times of trouble. We need far-reaching reforms such as those brought forth by Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Depression because, let's face it, our **farm economy** is in almost the same shape. Our country **needs major reforms in the farm credit system** to permit the renegotiation of current debts. Although the farm bills of 1985 and 1990 have tried to boost subsidies, there is still a great amount of surplus in the food caves of the United States government. How ironic that in rural America there are farmers **barely making enough to feed their families.**

The future generations of agriculturist must take heed of this disaster. As young men and women proceed through the ranks of agricultural businesses, they must take hold of their ideas and use them to insure the foundation of America--**agri-culture**. If agriculture ever breaks down, the United States risks losing its whole economy. **I firmly believe** it is the duty of **every American** to try to help the farmers out of their troubled times. We must **all** realize that the effects of a great farm tragedy will be felt by every American.

American farmers are still the best in the world and the bounty they produce is truly a national treasure. But if we do not insure our farmers the rights to produce fruits to reap, we may see this irony turn into a tragedy. We must all band together in order to help our government see just how much we need the farmer. If we can put millions of dollars a year into saving endangered animals, the least we can do is to do the same for the farmer before he too, becomes endangered. The government must realize that the farmer is a unique asset to this country, not only to its history, but to its future also. The government must take a stand and help out its farmers instead of standing back and "just looking".

Footnotes*

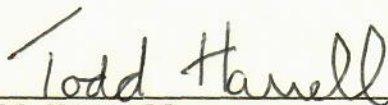
1. Dentzer, Susan and McCormick, John, "Bitter Harvest",
Newsweek, 18 February 1985, p.53.
2. Thomas, Rich, "Is This Just a Recession-Or the 'Big D'?",
Newsweek, 21 January 1991, p.44.
3. Bender, David L. and Leone, Bruno, Economics in America,
St. Paul, Greenhaven Press, 1986, p.200.
4. (see 3) p.184
5. The World Yearbook, Chicago, World Book Inc., 1991, p.297.
6. (see 3) p. 178

Bibliography

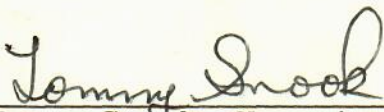
1. Bender, David L. and Leone, Bruno, Economics in America, St. Paul: Greenhaven Press, 1986.
2. Dentzer, Susan and McCormick, John, "Bitter Harvest", Newsweek, 18 February 1985, 52-60.
3. Kushmen, Jill Menkes, The Farming Industry, New York: Franklin Watts, 1984.
4. United States Department of Agriculture (1988) Marketing U.S. Agriculture: 1988 Yearbook of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
5. United States Department of Agriculture (1989) U.S. Agriculture in a Global Economy: 1989 Yearbook of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
6. The World Yearbook, Chicago, World Book Inc., 1990.
7. The World Yearbook, Chicago, World Book Inc., 1991.
8. Thomas, Rich, "Is This Just a Recession-Or the 'Big D'?", Newsweek, 21 January 1991, 44.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

As required by the rules of the Public Speaking contest, I am submitting this statement of originality of this speech which I have prepared. This work is mine by every means, as I have developed it by taking all of the facts and information from the references that I have listed in the bibliography attached to this paper.



Todd Harrell



Tommy Snook, Vo. Ag. Teacher