

American Agriculture Not Political, Benson Advises Poultry Federation

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Anyone — and we still have some — who would make prices the central theme of farm policy is doing a great disservice to farm families.

Today the so-called basic crops — the ones that have had the supposed benefits of rigid price supports right up to the harvest of last fall — these crops are now in more serious difficulties than are the crops and livestock that have not been price supported.

How can cotton, or tobacco, or wheat farmers, who have been sharply restricted in their acreage, produce an adequate living for their families? Actually some of them have almost been forced out of farming by the controls that have followed upon their price supports.

This is a tragic circumstance.

I welcome this opportunity to discuss with you some of these problems. It is imperative that they shall be more fully understood, not only by farm people but by all Americans.

This is my first public address since the national political conventions. During the next two and a half months much attention will be focused on political discussions — and that agriculture will get its share of political attention is abundantly clear.

I have a feeling that a good

deal of politics has been buzzing around my head for the past three and a half years. But you know by now that I am not a politician — at least many people have told you so many times.

However that may be, from now until November — and I say this in all seriousness — I will be neither more political nor less political, in what I say and do, than I have been in the past.

Farm people — my people — have problems — serious ones. These problems have been brought on in large part by politics. They will not be solved by more political maneuvering. They will be solved only by facing facts — by sound thinking, and sound action.

The farm problem has not changed because this is a political year. I was reared on a farm. I have operated my own farm and have worked with and for farm people practically all my life. I have stated my views on what must be done to work our way out of the present difficulties of agriculture. These views have not changed because of a coming election. And I shall continue to state these views as clearly as I can, and to as many people as I can, between now and election — and after election as necessary.

American agriculture is neith-

er Republican nor Democrat. Farm people cannot, and must not, be thought of as a group who may put on the political auction block. Their problems cannot be solved that way.

At the same time, I am glad this is a presidential election year — and I am not at all unhappy that some people are choosing to make agricultural problems an issue in the campaign. But of all the discussion—and even controversy — will come better understanding of farm problems than we have had for a long time! I am confident of the good judgment of farm people — because they know, perhaps better than most, that "as ye sow so shall ye reap."

At the very heart of the agricultural issue is whether our farms are to continue to be operated by free men or, on the other hand, to offset some very real and obvious problems that farmers now face, will government go in the opposite direction and subsidize agriculture in such a manner that it also takes control?

If price supports are to be increased, and are to be extended to more crops and to livestock, as again is being proposed in the political debate about agriculture, then farmers will be subjected to more controls. Such a result would be inescapable. Producers would have to be told how many sows they can keep and how many pigs the sows may farrow — how many hens they can keep, and how many eggs the hens may lay.

Control is the inevitable, the unavoidable twin of the subsidy. Subsidized prices — meaning prices consistently and substantially higher than the market would pay — always lead to surpluses. This is because artificially high, guaranteed prices are a green light to producers, and encourage production. At the same time they are a red light to consumers and discourage consumption. If more — or even the same amount — is produced, but less can be sold, then what is called surpluses begin to accumulate. Then output has to be restricted in an effort to restore balance between supply and demand. Restricted production means that the right to produce has to be rationed among farmers. And this requires use of the government's

police power, to restrain farmers, in our free country.

This is a sequence of cause and effect that is bitter as gall to me. As a permanent condition in our agriculture it is no more necessary than it is desirable.

Our most critical farm problems — both national and for most farmers — are those rooted in our surpluses. There are other problems, as there always have been. But we could live with, and surmount the others if we could get out from under the distortions and disruptions caused by the surpluses.

I would like briefly to review five questions with you.

1. How did we get these surpluses?
2. Whose surpluses are they?
3. What are they doing to farmers?
4. Why haven't we gotten rid of them?
5. What can be done about them?

1. How did we get the surpluses?

We have the surpluses primarily because we carried wartime incentive price supports too long into postwar years. During World War II price supports were raised from the pre-war range of 52 to 75 per cent of parity and placed at 90 per cent in order to stimulate all out production to meet war needs. Farmers responded magnificently.

War places insatiable demands on agriculture. It requires every pound, and bushel, and bale that can be produced. But after

some postwar rehabilitation, the same quantities and kind of produce can not be sold at the same prices in peacetime markets. And yet the wartime incentive levels of price supports on the six so-called basic commodities — the same rigid 90 per cents — were extended year after year following the war. The final extension was in July 1952, for two years — in other words, through the marketing year for the harvests of 1954. Thus for a decade after the war — right up to the harvests of last year — the price support levels on the basic commodities were still calling on farmers to produce just as they did in wartime. And yet we did not have the wartime markets.

Surpluses began to accumulate in 1948 and 1949. Korea reversed the trend, briefly. Then the pile up became even more rapid.

At first only a few items were involved — particularly wheat

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