

# Farm Group Seeks To Bring Farmers, Consumers Together

What part do farmers play in the economic problems to today? What are they trying to do to help? What would it be like to live on a farm?

Many who would otherwise have little or no opportunity to find out are about to do so, when the Agriculture

Council of America brings its Direct Touch program to town beginning next month.

The ongoing campaign will "provide grassroots contact between people who buy food and fiber, and those who grow it," according to ACA Chairman Baxter Freese,

cattleman from Wellman, Iowa.

After a highly successful test effort in Chicago and the Midwest last fall, ACA feels the time is right to present its unique program to mass city audiences in the Eastern states of New York, New

Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia. During the next few weeks, many in the area will have a chance to actually visit a farm, or talk directly to someone responsible for putting food on our tables, and generally learn what things are really like on the farm.

One of the first phases of Direct Touch involves city-farm exchanges, where selected families spend a three-day weekend on a working farm during the harvest. Farm families will later spend a weekend in the city as guests of the same family who visited them. Last fall's Chicago "Swap" resulted not only in better understanding between city and farm — both among those who actually participated and those who merely read or heard of the experience through the media — but lasting friendships as well. And when two farm participants scheduled their return visit recently, so many of the city families' neighbors were interested that discussions had to be held in the banquet room of an area hotel.

A "Farm Line" is also being set up in the five-state region. Interested consumers will be able to dial a toll-free number and talk directly to a farmer or rancher who will answer their questions about agriculture. Dates of operation have yet to be pinned down, but ACA hopes to open the lines two consecutive nights each month, with different commodity groups — wheat, dairy, cattle, etc — taking turns manning the phones. Incoming calls kept the lines at peak capacity during last fall's test in Chicago.

Two other Direct Touch programs of note scheduled for operation here involve panel discussions between farmers and influential consumer leaders, and in the symbolic sense "deeding"

some rural acreage to high city officials, with subsequent reports on how crops on that land fare from month to month.

The Agriculture Council of America is a non-profit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. It is made up of individual farmers and ranchers; representatives of various farm organizations; and businesses that supply farm equipment, fertilizers and other items necessary for production.

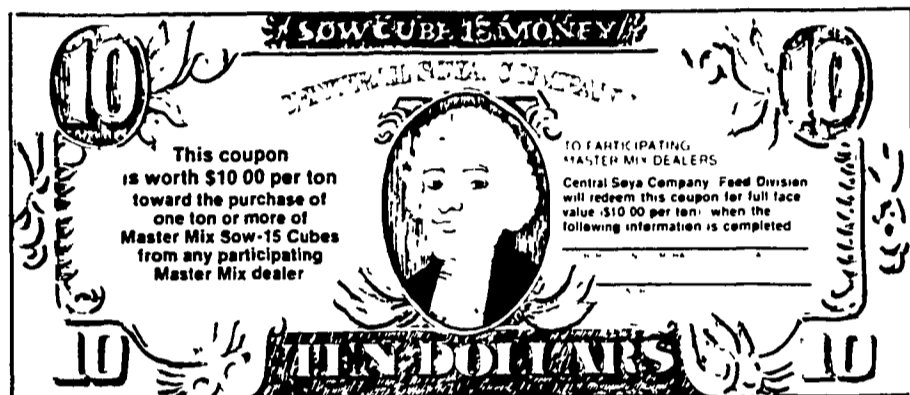
It was formed, according to chairman Freese, primarily to build a base of public support for agriculture. He pointed out that during the past 150 years America has shifted from a nation of people who were mostly farmers, to a country in which 95 percent of the population is concentrated in urban areas. Most have lost sight of how droughts, fuel crises, strikes

and boycotts can affect food and fiber production and, consequently, the availability and cost of everyone's basic needs.

"All our programs are aimed at putting city people and farm people in touch with each other — face to face, by phone or mail — so we can all learn more about the interaction between those who buy and those who grow," Freese said. "Our experiences in Chicago proved that a better understanding of the problems faced by both consumers and farmers will result, and it is hoped that, as we extend our efforts nationally, we can find ways of working together to improve our food supply system so everyone will benefit."

Anyone wishing further information about the Agriculture Council of America can contact ACA at Suite 1025, 1625 Eye Street, N. W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

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