

Farm threats allegedly political

CHICAGO, Ill. — The threat of a corporate farm takeover of American agriculture is an election year "bogeyman," according to the head of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Allan Grant, president of the 2,500,000 member-family American Farm Bureau Federation, says "despite what you may hear in this election year about the death of the 'family' farm, patterns of farm ownership have remained virtually unchanged for the past 50 years or more.

"About three per cent of all farms were 'corporation' farms 50 years ago, and that figure remains almost identical now," Grant told those attending the National Society of Accountants for Cooperatives, holding their 41st annual meeting here. He said that corporation farms of various kinds now make up about seven per cent of U.S. farmland.

The farm leader said that politicians and others "carefully perpetuate" fears that agri-business conglomerates and well-heeled corporations are muscling farm and ranch families off the land. He called such fears "a form of myth carefully contrived and perpetuated by politicians and others as part of an election year bag of tricks."

Political fascination with the alleged problem of "preserving" the family farm, he said, stems from an in-

tense desire on the part of some political candidates to become identified in the public mind with the solid virtues of American farm life, and to be seen as champions and protectors of individual voters.

"Defending the family farm from the supposed inroads of corporate bigness — and consumers from the implied higher prices supposedly imposed by farming cartels — has almost irresistible appeal to the true politician," Grant said. He added, "Often another purpose of the exercise is to convince people that government 'protection' is good for agriculture.

"In reality, corporations usually do very poorly in agriculture. Most truly corporate farms have low productive efficiency compared to family operations and their rate of return on monies invested is unattractive to shareholders," Grant said.

There are however, many incorporated family farming operations Grant noted, in listing a number of legal and organizational reasons why farm and ranch families take this action. "It eases the transfer of farm property from one generation to the next, and helps assure that the farm stays in the family. It makes sense to sell or transfer the whole farm on a share-by-share basis rather than go through a cow-by-cow and acre-by-acre sell-off," Grant said.

"In some states and under some conditions, there may be a modest tax advantage to having the family farm incorporated, but not always. In some cases it may actually cost the family money, but is worthwhile in a legal sense in helping assure that the farm remains intact.

"Nearly two-thirds of all farming corporations are family-owned and controlled; over 80 per cent of all land owned by corporations is held by family corporations with 10 shareholders or less," Grant told the group.

Also diluting the figures, Grant said, are such corporate

farm structures as agricultural experimental stations, prison farms, "boystowns" and similar operations where farming is done more for social reasons than for the actual production and sale of crops.


Grant said that Farm Bureau has been studying the effects of "tax-loss" farming (entry of non-agricultural firms or professional people into farming to obtain tax write-offs against non-farm income), and that loopholes in the law creating tax advantages to encourage this should be closed.



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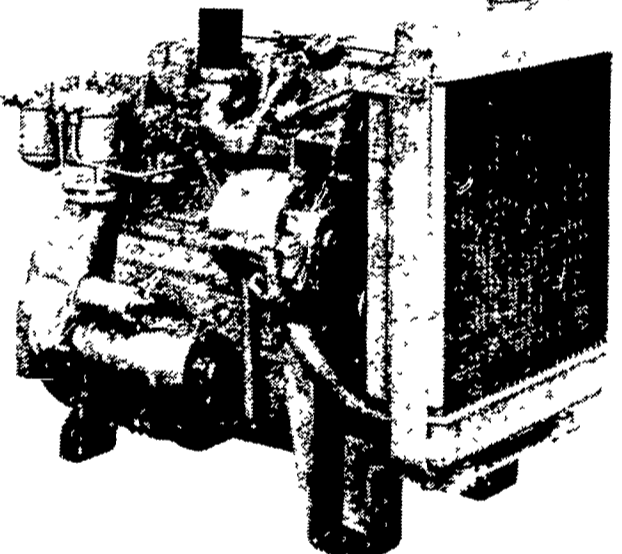
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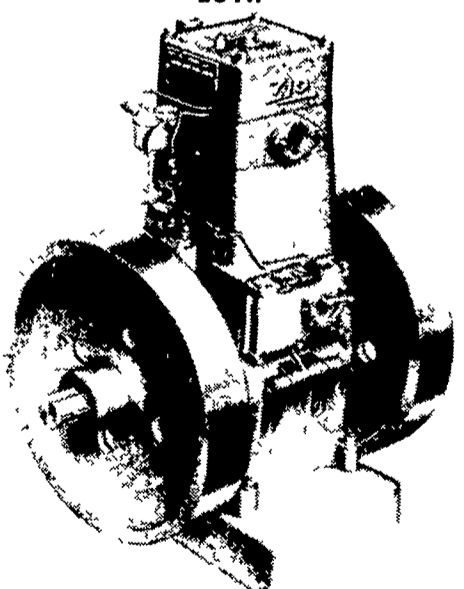
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