

Knebel favors present farm policies

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following are excerpts from a speech given last month by John A. Knebel, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The new farm bill which must be written next year will be the most important piece of legislation to come before the 95th Congress in 1977.

With the farm programs now on the books scheduled to

expire next year, American agriculture is at the crossroads. The decision Congress makes will influence agriculture in this country for the next generation.

The present market-oriented policy saved taxpayers well over \$3 billion annually in farm payments and up to \$1 million daily for storage and handling of surplus farm production. At an earlier time of the heavier costs, America was suffering trade imbalances.

Since 1974, the United States has been recording favorable balances in international trade. It is more than coincidental that we have been exporting agricultural products in record amounts during that same time.

United States agricultural exports provide many other benefits.

They boost employment. More than 50,000 jobs are created for every \$1 billion of agricultural products exported. These jobs are among those held by nearly 17 million Americans who are employed in the agricultural chain from production on the farm to sale in the stores.

Exports stabilize the economy. The American dollar is sounder in international business and buys more. In addition, for every \$1 received from agricultural exports, \$2.20 in spending is generated in our economy.

At the same time, the projection for food prices in the United States next year suggests a modest increase, markedly lower than the inflationary trend. American consumers are realizing that the groceries they buy are the best deal in the world - and this includes the production from the farms and ranches of this great state.

American consumers spend only 17 percent of disposable income for the best and most nutritious food ever produced. Compare that with the Soviet Union where the consumer is spending 37 percent for food and doesn't get nearly the selection, quality or built-in services that the U.S. housekeeper gets.

If each farm worker is to continue to feed himself and 56 others in this nation and abroad and if America is to continue as the leading exporter of agricultural products, Congress must make the correct decision in the 1977 farm law. It must write legislation which will continue the progress of the past four years - legislation which will keep farm exports at record levels, which will maintain farm income at the highest levels ever, which will reaffirm the role of the farmer as the mainstay of the nation's economic progress.

There will be various attempts to adjust the legislation now in effect. One method may aim at setting support levels based on cost of production. There are many variables - weather, geographic location, farm size, interest rates and managerial ability among them - that would make it difficult to come up with cost-of-production figures that would be satisfactory on a commodity-wide basis.

There are no scientific formulas for solving farm economic problems. But they can be solved by understanding the simple economics of supply and demand, providing a wide range of markets and having faith and confidence in the experience and intelligence of America's farmers to meet the needs.

The American farmer has never failed us. I am confident he never will.

Government officials should look closely at regulations and proposed regulations on America's food producers and handlers. Everything must be done to keep competition spirited, but superfluous and needless regulations will add unnecessarily to the prices that Americans have to pay at the grocery stores.

The Department of Agriculture is very much aware of a move to unionize farm workers and the subsequent probable effect on farm production costs and grocery prices.

Obviously, farm workers are entitled to a livable wage and reasonable security for themselves and their families. But, at the same time, the rights of millions of other humans and their humans are involved and must be remembered. Strikes or lockouts which destroy the availability of food cannot be condoned because they affect the very lives of other innocent humans.

Farmers who grow perishable fruits and vegetables are particularly vulnerable and their rights must be observed and protected. If they are forced into bankruptcy and closure, then the production of food there will cease.

A proposal for an Agricultural Labor Relations Board has been drawn and is in the hands of Department of Labor officials for study and consideration.

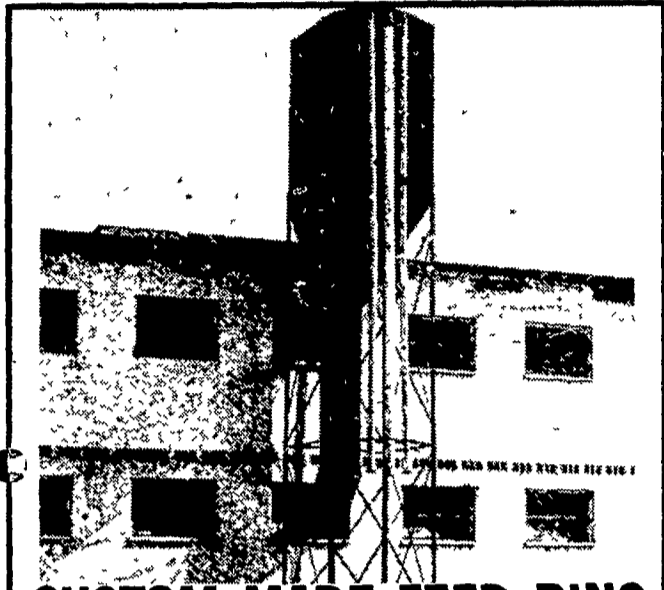
There were proposals in the last Congress to extend the Taft-Hartley Act to include agricultural workers, and there probably will be similar proposals made by members of the new Congress which convenes in January.

Recent farm labor results in California may indicate the national mood for the future. California voters defeated, by two to one, Proposition 14 early this month that would have permitted union organizers to spend several hours daily recruiting workers on farms and ranches.

The American farmer is getting recognition in recent years for the vital job he has done. Our fellow Americans are more aware now than ever before of the farmer's crucial role in the nation's productivity and strength.

Americans are becoming conscious today that less than five percent of their population lives and works on farms, producing the materials necessary for sustaining life.

They must realize that the American farmer is entitled to a reasonable reward for his risks and efforts; otherwise, production of food and fiber will diminish and prices will soar.



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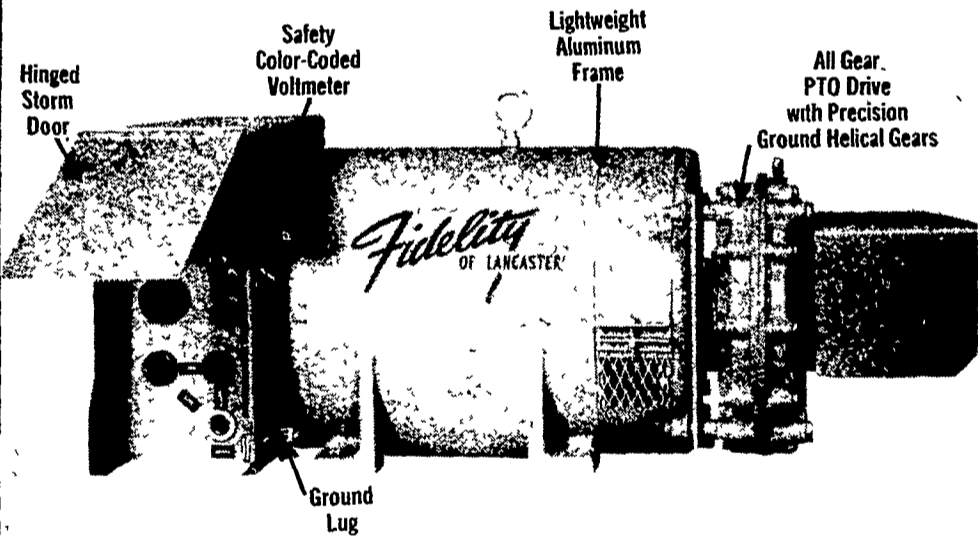
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