



"The hearing room" can be an awesome sight to a Pennsylvania farm wife when she knows she has to testify.

Adventures in the hearing room

By JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

WASHINGTON — As I returned to the hearing room, my husband was frantically signalling to me. I grabbed a dog-eared folder stuffed with papers, hastily took the seat behind the microphone and faced members of the United States House of Representatives Agriculture Committee.

This was a "first" for three Pennsylvania farm wives, inexperienced in matters of government testimony, but prepared to learn first-hand how it was done. We had come at the request of American Agri-Women, and were representing both the A.A.W. national organization and our statewide Penn's Agri-Women. The role of spokesman had been given to me, with state coordinator Ethel Gross, Manchester R2, and asst. coordinator Naomi Spahr, Litz R6, completing our small delegation. Added at the last minute to the team effort was my husband, who agreed to get us there safely following another several inches of snow that a storm had dumped the previous night.

Hearings had been scheduled to assess the general economic situation faced by American farmers, brought to the headlines by spreading farm unrest and publicized by the "farm strike" movement. Following six days of intensive study, telephone calls, writing and printing deadlines, we were anxious to present our proposals to the Committee.

Testimony from assorted representatives had been taken over a several-day period and the February 14 hearing was the last session open to public witnesses. The two following days were allotted to hear out the American Agriculture, "strike" representatives, some of who had remained in Washington lobbying since

the December 14, 1977 strike date. Many others had flown to Washington just for the several days of hearings and planned to stay until the final two days earmarked for the strike movement had been concluded.

Into the ornate hearing room on the third floor of the Longworth Building, a large office complex for House members, farmers had crowded until there was no room to stand. Hats and jackets proclaimed their strike affiliation. Knowing that I was not prepared to recommend the national legislators the same directives that the majority was demanding - one hundred per cent parity - did little to ease the convention of butterflies that had gathered in my stomach.

Late in the afternoon, the half-dozen legislators attending the hearings (out of 50 on the committee) were summoned to the Capitol for roll-call on a bill up for voting. Upon returning from the "calm the fidgets" walk I took during the brief recess, I heard my name being called.

The Agri-Women testimony came near the end of the session which included speakers from agri-business, bankers, a farm implement dealer, the Wheat Growers Association, Cotton Pool, a Virginia Neighborhood Association, and independent farmers from Kansas, California, Iowa, and Washington.

Most speakers had focused on higher supports, increased acreage set-asides, adjusted loan levels, selling quotas and the 100 per cent parity demand.

Agri-Women, both on the state and national level, is set up as a coalition of individuals and organizations to work toward a united agriculture and to concentrate energies on the goals that we share, rather than our differences. In opening statements, we explained our purposes and issued that plea for unity

Our testimony stressed that farmers only receive a small portion of the actual food dollar; and that even if growers were to give their harvest away for nothing, supermarket food purchasers would see little reduction in overall price.

Emphasis was placed on the fact that most farmers do not want handouts or guaranteed incomes. They are, however, becoming increasingly frustrated at subsidizing a policy of artificially cheap food for a population obsessed with collecting expensive luxuries.

Rather than demand government intervention through increased subsidies and payments, Agri-Women called for a curtailment on the ever-growing demands on the economy from the 96 per cent population that is non-farm and from the intolerable burdens of a government that is increasingly bureaucratic and over-regulatory.

Suggestions for improving the state of the farm economy included a call for expanded export markets and changes in the taxing system of variable levies both here and abroad.

We called for the freedom to use agricultural chemical

tools which enable the farmer to efficiently produce the high quality food demanded by the American public without stifling and unnecessary regulations. Increased research funds and enabling self-assessment legislation to aid farmers in finding more nutritious varieties of foodstuffs, disease resistance in plants and animals and increased levels of production through superior genetics were suggested.

Protection for our cooperative marketing system, legislation barring imports of food produced below U.S. quality standards and increased research into finding alternative energy and fuels were other of our recommendations presented to the House Agriculture Committee.

Our concern for the state of the farmer's national pocketbook was summed up in this closing paragraph: "And if the time comes when we have been regulated - when we have been legislated - when we have been frustrated right out of the independent agriculture business, the following epitaph can be chiseled on our gravestones: Hungry? Out of food? Eat a bureaucrat for lunch."

Travelogue set for 4th

LANCASTER — Another in a series of travel and adventure programs sponsored by The Paradise Rotary Club will be held today (March 4) at the Conestoga Valley High School, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Appearing in person to narrate his own film "By Sail Through the Caribbean" will be Jean Poisson, who is an accomplished celestial navigator and blue water sailor with 14 years of experience sailing his 33 foot sloop "Le Bateau" through

the beautiful Caribbean West Indian Islands.

Poisson will visit the beautiful Grenadine Islands where the pace is slow and the atmosphere congenial, and see Petit St. Vincent, Palm Island and the incomparable Tobago Cays. He will explore uninhabited islands and roam native villages.

Tickets for "By Sail Through the Caribbean" may be purchased at the door, \$1.75 each for adults, \$1 students, or a special adult "Six Admission Ticket" for \$7.

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