

This farmer

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Recollecting his visit to Washington, Coles said: "The prettiest thing I saw - and it put a lump in my throat - was at night in the mall, as I looked out at the dome of the Capitol all lit up. The snow was on the ground along with all the tractors, and the full moon was coming up over the Capitol. It made me have a divine feeling. I thought 'Oh, God, why can't they listen and understand.'"

Despite the fact that the activities in Washington have not received the official endorsement of the majority of farmers, Coles speculates that the movement may have more support than the actual figures indicate. While only 2000 to 3000 farmers travelled to the nation's capital, he's convinced thousands more would like to have gone.

"Everybody can't go," quipped Jesse Nelson, a neighbor who also sympathizes with the movement.

Nelson, who believes unions are to blame for the nation's economic woes, questions why farmers don't get an annual cost of living raise like everyone else. "Our income hasn't gone up like our expenses," he commented. "They're always telling us to get more efficient," he went on.

According to Nelson and the Coles, there's little, if any, room left to become more efficient.

Mrs. Coles, who is a vocal and active supporter of the Washington tractorcade in her own right, emphasizes that the thought of the farmers just demonstrating for higher prices is "just not true." There is a lot more involved, she says.

According to the Coles, the AAM is fighting for the survival of the family farm in America and for more financial independence, rather than dependence on financial institutions. They are also concerned about conglomerates and foreign interests, both of which are chiseling away at America's agricultural potential, they say. Imports, politics, taxes, estate planning, foreign aid, are also topics of concern. The AAM, say the Coles, isn't in Washington just to parade around with tractors, they're in town to question and talk with legislators.

The Coles pray and hope that legislators and the general public will listen to and understand their pleas. They believe that if the facts are understood, support will be forthcoming.

Members of the American Farm Bureau Federation, The Grange, and the Woodstown Friends Meeting, the Coles are genuinely concerned about the future of farming as they have known it. They note that farms and operating costs are becoming increasingly expensive. While the farmer once used to be in charge of his own destiny, he is becoming increasingly hemmed in by government and financial institutions, the Coles explain. They're worried about that. They and other supporters of the Washington tractorcade aren't just concerned about 1979, they're concerned about 1980 and 1985 and other years down the road, the Coles added. They insist that the trends that have been established in farming must be checked lest the family farming concept will be destroyed forever.

Mrs. Coles, who is an enthused and excited member of American Agri-Women, goes even farther: "There's a big problem in the world with farming. The future of the country is at stake." History has proven, she continued, that in order for a nation to have a healthy economy, it

must have a healthy farm business. "Right now we have neither," she proclaimed.

"It's about time people in agriculture stand together," the New Jersey farm wife continued. "Why should we produce cheap food?" she asked.

"I really think that the last thing those farmers want is for the government to support them," she went on. "A farmer is going to farm if he possibly can. If we had a healthy agriculture there wouldn't be any land to sell."

The Coles believe that there is a direct connection between farmers going out of business and government and big international monied interests putting the pressure on them. "They control the money," they charged, "and they want the family farmer out of business."

The Coles are fearful of eventual total world domination by an extraordinary wealthy and powerful international organization known as the Trilateral Commission. It supposedly is a coalition of American and foreign businessmen and politicians, including socialists and communists. Claiming that Eastern farmers really aren't very well informed, but that their Midwestern counterparts are, the Coles credit friends in South Dakota for their awareness.

"Quite frankly, I doubt we would have been interested in the Washington tractorcade if it weren't for personal contacts in South Dakota," said Mrs. Coles. "They have so much more information out there," she added, as her husband acknowledged agreement. Their South Dakota friends are cattle ranchers.

"We (farmers) are propping up the economy for a while, but a judgement day is going to come," Coles warned. He says that farmers can't continue the debt load, nor can the nation's economy be continually propped up by agricultural exports. Furthermore, both Coles and his wife claim that there are some discrepancies in the way trade is carried on. For example, they charge that exports are brought into the country even when domestic production is termed surplus. "And please don't think that all of the food in the schools is government-bought surplus," Mrs. Coles added. She has worked in school cafeterias and remembers unpacking poor quality tomatoes that were shipped in from Mexico.

Among other aims of the American Agriculture Movement, the Coles support the 100 per cent parity idea. "They're taking 100 per cent of our milk, why should we get 80 per cent parity," Mrs. Coles quipped.

Mrs. Coles, like many other members of the American Agri-Women, feels particularly offended by observations and statements by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland which indicate that the complaining farmers have "overextended themselves as a result of bad business management." She argues: "The government wants us to go out of business."

The New Jersey dairy farm couple also argues that if the laws of supply and demand are going to apply to agriculture, then they should also apply to other segments

of the economy, including labor unions. "We're being discriminated against," Cole charged.

Another sore spot for the Coles and others sympathetic to the AAM is that the farmer is sometimes caught in a situation whereby he can't make enough money to live on from year to year, and despite his huge investments, he can't depend on "cashing in" because of taxes. Most frustrating of all is the blockade that's encountered when one generation wants to pass the farm on to those next in line.


Coles purchased half of his father's 300 acre farm and rents an additional 100 acres. (His brother owns the other half.) Merton Coles raises corn and alfalfa, has 115 Holstein dairy cows, and 60 heifers. Their farm is located 33 miles south of Philadelphia.

Feed grain, wheat set-aside sign-up now

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Sign-up period for the 1979 feed grain and wheat set-aside programs is from February 15 through April 30, according to Ray Fitzgerald, Administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS).

The sign-up period which had been tentatively set to end in mid-April, is being lengthened two weeks to give county ASCS employees sufficient time to handle the added workload of simultaneous certification, he said.

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