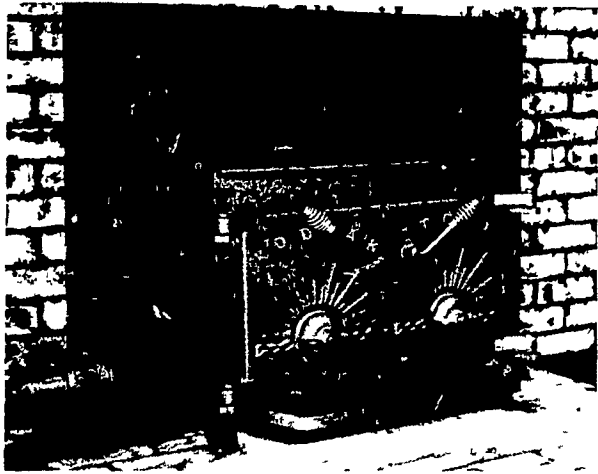


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# Bergland links farm prosperity to USDA policy



Robert Bergland

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland said last week that administration food and farm policies and programs have been a significant factor in restoring relative prosperity to American agriculture.

At the same time, he said, "these programs which give producers the freedom and flexibility to make their own economic decisions have led to a substantial reduction in costs of farm programs to the American taxpayer."

Bergland's remarks were prepared for delivery to more than 3,000 agricultural leaders from 13 states attending the 7th annual Southern Commodity Producers Conference here.

The Carter administration food and agriculture program — begun nearly two and one-half years ago — Bergland said, has been "tested, tuned and is now working for the benefit of American farmers, consumers, taxpayers, and a sizable portion of the world's population."

Noting that prices U.S. farmers receive for their crops and livestock are running about 16 per cent higher in 1979 than a year ago, Bergland predicted that net farm income this year, in current dollars, is expected to match the record \$33 billion reached in 1973.

Bergland said that higher prices this year will also result in about \$1.4 billion less in government payments to farmers.

Bergland said the restoration of relative agricultural prosperity is coming about in substantial measure because of the new programs proposed by the President and passed by Congress nearly two years ago.

"But it has been the gratifying response to these new programs, particularly the farmer-owned grain reserve program and the strong new thrust of the administration's agricultural export development plans — that actually insured their success."

Bergland said that this year's U.S. agricultural exports are likely to hit a record \$32 billion by the end of September, a gain of almost \$5 billion over a year ago and 53 percent more than 1973.

Export volume of major bulk commodities is forecast to rise this year about 4 percent from last year's 122 million metric tons and would represent a nearly 27 million-metric-ton increase over 1973, he said.

Further increases in tonnage, combined with stronger prices, should boost the value of U.S. farm exports to new records next year, Bergland said.

The secretary said the highly successful grain reserve program is rooted in President Carter's firm belief that farmers should control their own production and marketing, and not the federal government.

"What farmers really want is more stability both in prices and in markets," Bergland said. "What they don't need is dizzying profits one year, embargoes the next and catastrophic prices in the third."

"This administration gave American farmers the stabilizing tools to do the job," he said, "and they responded with enthusiasm."

Noting that prices are one indication of the success of the reserve, Bergland pointed out that in June 1977 when the grain reserve was inaugurated, wheat was \$2.03 a bushel. Last month it was \$3.73 a bushel, he said.

And in June 1977 the

average price for corn was \$2.12 a bushel. Last month it was \$2.47, Bergland said.

"We have given U.S. farmers the flexibility to take excess corn, wheat and other feed grains off the market when prices are low and to step into domestic and export markets when prices are to their advantage," Bergland told the conference.

Now that release levels on both grains have been reached, farmers have redeemed about 29 percent of the wheat reserve and slightly more than 7 percent of the corn reserve stocks," he said.

Bergland noted that it was only two years ago when former Deputy Secretary of Agriculture John White told the conference that 1977 would mark a 'turning point in American food and agriculture policies and programs.'

"At that time," the secretary said, "he assured you of the administration's commitment to policies and programs that would reverse the disastrous decline in farmers' income."

"Well, I can come before you today and say that this administration has carried through on that commitment."

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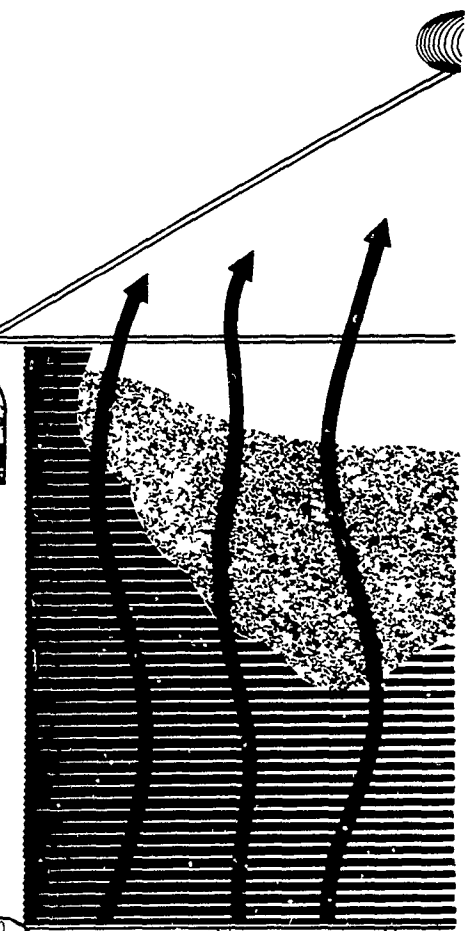
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