

Cattlemen call for free enterprise in agriculture

DENVER, Colo. — The National Cattlemen's Assn. called for a free enterprise approach to agriculture.

Speaking at a regional hearing on the structure of agriculture, NCA spokesman Hubbard Russell, Jr., declared that "continuation of the free enterprise system with less, not more, government intervention is the road we should travel."

"In fact, if government could tend more to its real responsibilities of reducing inflation and keeping a balanced budget, many of the problems of agriculture would be reduced, if not eliminated."

Russell, a cattleman from New Cuyama, Cal., is chairman of the NCA Private Lands and Water Usage Committee. He was among those speaking at a hearing held by Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland and the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Russell cited the efficiency of American agriculture and its role in improving the American standard of living — by improving agricultural output per man-hour and releasing people to produce other goods and services needed or desired by society.

"Over the last 30 years," Russell noted, "agricultural output per man-hour has risen by an average of 3.8% per year — a rate of increase six times faster than that of the private non-farm sector. As a result, Americans are not only the best fed people on earth, but they spend the smallest share of their incomes for food. The less we

need to spend on food, the more we have for other goods and services."

He went on to warn against further government interference with America's agricultural and food system.

"I do not believe government should set policy based on some stereotype of agriculture or, worse yet, the 'average family farm,'" Russell said.

"No two people have the same idea of what constitutes a family farm today and no idea of what a family farm will look like in the future. More importantly, any program aimed at such a 'will o' the wisp' definition is destined to mean more government regulation and intervention."

"Let's give maximum freedom to the people in agriculture and get government to work full time on ending inflation and balancing the budget," he said.

Russell traced the development of agriculture and attitudes toward the trend to larger, more efficient and fewer operations. In most other areas of society and the economy, he said, it is "fulfillment of the American dream to move upward to better and more rewarding occupations and higher income. Yet, let an able and successful farmer add acreage, a larger tractor, more stock, or a bigger barn — which not only improve the farmer's lot but give the consumers wider choices, better quality food and lower priced food —

and we begin to look for a bogeyman."

"In fact, the name chosen for these hearings — structure of agriculture — suggests a static rather than a dynamic condition. It almost implies that there is some ideal agriculture structure that would fit all times and all places. Moreover, it seems to offer a protective wall around agriculture from the changes that will take place in the rest of the economy and the world."

Russell noted that agriculture has changed greatly and will continue to change — unless there is even more government interference.

"Agriculture's structure is not a goal — or an ideal — but an economic means of providing consumers with food of the best quality and at the fairest price possible," he continued.

"We should never forget that our way of life as farmers and ranchers — whether on 10 acres or 10,000 acres — is possible only as long as we meet our customers' needs. Our claim for our way of life is not superior to that of any other profession or occupation, and hope alone will not save us," he said.

He noted that occupations and industries that have disappeared over the years generally have done so because they didn't meet a changing society's needs.

Russell said he, like many other farmers and ranchers, often longed for a time when things were more orderly and slower-paced. But, he

added, "then I look around at the standard of living we enjoy — things my parents and certainly my grandparents couldn't even dream of — and the past seems less idyllic."

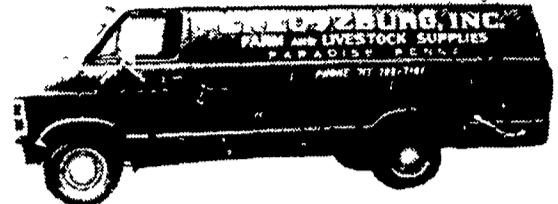
The NCA spokesman told Secretary Bergland: "You and I are part of this evolutionary agriculture process because of the free enterprise system. Those who have left agriculture have for the most part gone on to do worthwhile and rewarding things — and, in the process, raised the standards of living of both of us. The free entry into and withdrawal from agriculture and the right to buy and sell land as we see fit has served all of us extremely well."

Russell indicated that most commercial farmers and ranchers have goals and needs like those in the rest of the economy and society. And, he said, society as well as agriculture itself will be best served in the long run if agriculture is permitted to operate in a free enterprise economy — letting economics rather than undefined "social goals" allocate resources and determine the structure of agriculture.

He said imposing more controls and requiring taxpayers to subsidize those farmers who do not want to be part of the competitive system would hurt, not help,

today's efficient farm and ranch operators and their families, and such action would only reduce supplies and increase the cost of food to the public.

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Hearing set for southeast milk area

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board has scheduled a hearing for the Southeastern Milk Marketing Area Number 1 Zone 2.

Subject matter of the meeting will be limited to wholesale discounts charged in that area and zone, according to PMMB Executive Secretary Earl B. Fink, Jr.

The hearing will be held in Room 309, Agriculture Building, 2301 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg on Friday, December 28, beginning at 9 a.m.

The hearing has been called by PMMB upon a petition received from the Milk Distributors Association of the Philadelphia Area, Inc.

Subject to change by the Board during the hearing, the schedule to be followed in the presentation of testimony is as follows:

First will be testimony by the petitioner, followed by the dealers, producers, Commonwealth witnesses, and testimony by consumers and all other interested parties.

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