



Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

There was a time when the farm bloc had a lot to say about who was elected to political office in this country. Presidential hopefuls courted the farmer

promising him all kinds of things in exchange for his vote.

But over the years the differences between farmers and nonfarmers have lessened. Farm votes have dwindled and the personal contact between farmers and politicians has almost vanished.

Instead, the candidates go for media blitzes and appearances where large crowds can be counted. Places like factory gates, shopping centers and bustling urban centers. Once in a while one will venture out into farm country to test the water and make a few promises, but usually they retreat rather rapidly when faced with some of the questions farmers pose for them.

The result of all this has been a virtual breakdown in the farm bloc when it comes to electing a president. And to a large measure this is also true of some lesser political offices. Farmers are counted just like factory workers, housewives, office workers, salesmen, and everybody else. They're just voters and they're not given much special consideration.

But farmers don't think that's the way it ought to be

and so they're flexing their muscles here and there in various ways, including marches on Washington and large annual farm meetings where top politicians are invited — and where some actually go. In those circumstances, sometimes our politicians and political hopefuls get a chance to hear what farmers are thinking.

A new effort to tell the politicians about farm concerns has been instituted by the Agriculture Council of America.

This is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization made up of farmers, farm and commodity organizations, and businesses that serve the agricultural community. ACA is famous for its toll-free farm lines that are conducted periodically where anybody in the country can call in and talk to government leaders.

The most recent one of these farm lines was done a few weeks ago when ACA held the nation's first "National Farm Issues Primary." In this one, people were encouraged to call and talk to the political candidates or their representatives about agricultural issues. The callers were also asked some

questions to help draw out certain information that might be useful in shaping agricultural policy.

Here's the lead-off question from that survey: "There has been much talk lately about cutting off food shipments to another country when that country does something we don't like. Do you believe there are times other than during wartime when the U.S. should cut off food shipments to another country?"

If a caller answered that question "yes" then the follow-up question, "Should U.S. food shipments to another country be cut off if that country takes over property owned by American companies; invades one of its neighbors; violates the human rights of its own citizens even though it may be an ally of ours; or mistreats American citizens within its own borders?"

Another question: "Do you believe there's an energy crisis? And even if you don't, do you think the rising price of fuel will cause an increase in no-till farming; will make us turn to alternative fuels like gasohol; will lead to a decline in productivity in food supply; or will lead to an increase in food costs?"

There were several other questions that dealt with things like farmland preservation, the qualities of a good president, what the

government can do to help the farmer, and what single issue should be the most important one for the current presidential campaign.

About 450 people from 29 states called the farm line to ask questions and respond to the survey. Most of them tagged inflation as the most important issue for the presidential hopefuls to focus on.

More than half didn't agree with the grain embargo and almost two-thirds thought the next president should be a strong leader who won't mind making some enemies in order to get things done.

The majority of callers felt there is an energy crisis and that in turn will lead to an increase in food costs, a decline in productivity and reduction in food supply and a move to alternative fuels like gasohol.

The callers also felt the government should:

Be doing more to help the small farmer;

Guarantee farmers a market price at least equal to the average cost of production;

Try giving tax credits and other incentives for reduction of work-related accidents and for cutting down on pollution.

No doubt the old farm bloc that elected presidents and

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