

John Block

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ag export teams traveling to China and Japan in 1978 and 1979. He went to Taiwan to conduct a marketing survey for farm exports there.

He represented Illinois at the Anuga Food Show in West Germany in 1977 and during that trip met with agricultural attaches in West Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture also reports Block supervised the Department's export offices in Brussels, Belgium and in Hong Kong.

In short, Block is an export-minded farmer whose passport shows he's been around to see potential U.S. farm products customers face-to-face.

Block's list of accomplishments since becoming Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture leads off with his work in market development.

He expanded promotion of Illinois agricultural products both domestically and abroad through strong cooperation with commodity groups and food exporting companies.

Block claims to have established over 50 direct markets for agricultural products through food shows and similar activities.

Some of his programs were a bit more controversial. He doubled the number of thoroughbred and standardbred horses in Illinois through purse supplements at tracks.

Preservation of agricultural land also received attention during his administration of the Illinois Ag Department.

He obtained an executive

order from Illinois Governor James Thompson giving the Agriculture Department the responsibility for preservation of prime agricultural land.

State agencies must now meet certain criteria before farmland can be converted to non-farm use under that order.

He was instrumental in establishing statewide sedimentation and erosion control guidelines.

He led the development of strict guidelines for reclamation of mined lands.

In addition the Department, under Block, developed and implemented the state's first conservation cost-share program, providing funding for soil and water conservation districts and establishing state funding for soil surveys.

Since 1977 the Department established an alternative fuels program which led to conversion of the entire fleet of Illinois state cars to gasohol.

The Department also undertook a program to identify markets for agricultural by-products which were being wasted.

Farmers received further protection from the Department in their grain marketing.

Under Block, the most comprehensive grain handling industry regulations in the nation were enacted into law. The Illinois law now is a model for other states seeking to protect farmers.

Block guided agency participation in a state-wide effort to develop pesticide container disposal procedures. Efforts likely will reduce regulatory

duplication and minimize the compliance burden to agriculture, Block says.

Block and the Illinois Department of Agriculture are credited with playing a leading role in Congress passage of the Swine Health Protection Act of 1980.

It's not surprising that an influential hogman would have pushed for a law giving the nation's swine industry more protection from the dread African Swine Fever disease.

Illinois became the first state in the nation to be Mycoplasma Gallisepticum free. That state pioneered efforts to eradicate the turkey disease.

It also has a nationally recognized information program to alert practicing veterinarians and cattle producers to the threat of cattle scabies.

Block also pushed for greater understanding between the farm and city people of the state through several programs including country fairs. Upstate-Downstate differences are legend in Illinois. The Chicago Country Fair Farm-City day, and farm visits for minority and inner-city children may help to lessen the difference.

A nutrition and ag education program was developed to provide resources to schools. A number of consumer information activities were instituted to expand off-farm awareness of food and food products.

Under Block, Illinois Ag Department implemented a long-range system of goals and objectives planning, including a data planning and information study section.

The first employee training program to increase efficiency and skills of ag department employees was instituted.

Meantime Block was working as vice president of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

Perhaps more immediate to his being nominated U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Block was a strong Reagan supporter. He was ag advisor on Reagan's Voters Advisory Council chaired by Elizabeth Dole.

He served as a member of Reagan's Agricultural Task Force.

He is apt to bring to Washington a bit of the old Earl Butz philosophy. He did serve as a member of the former U.S. Ag Secretary's Committee on Feed Grains and Soybeans in 1977.

Other than that association, Block is slim on Washington experience.

He is likely to be a strong proponent of free market opportunities for farmers already being on the record as opposed to embargoes. But he has said he would

support the use of food as a weapon.

One of his early problems will be to get to know the Washington scene as well as he has gotten to know the international export scene.

There should be little surprise that a mid-westerner was nominated as Agriculture Secretary. The fact he is from the grain belt will help him with a number of influential people on the Hill at Washington. What his reception will be among the Southern farm bloc remains to be seen.

It should come as no surprise that a man who

maintains the kind of schedule Block has kept in past years is something of a physical fitness buff.

Block describes himself as an avid runner and has competed in a number of races.


He counts his finish in this year's Boston Marathon as an important achievement. Indeed many persons with fewer than Block's 45 years would like to list a finish at the Marathon among their accomplishments.

John Block and his wife Sue have three children, a son and two daughters.



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