

Helms says "pleased" with conservation title, reports on Farm Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry last week approved an omnibus four-year Farm Bill, and ordered it reported to the full Senate for action.

Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the Committee (R-N.C.), praised the 17 Senators on the Committee for their work on the bill, which included more than a month of hearings followed by two weeks of drafting the bill.

He said, "While we have had differences, this bill reflects an effort to reach a bi-partisan solution to our many farm problems. Our compromise does not go as far toward market orientation as did my original proposal, but it does provide a mechanism for farmers to obtain their profits in the marketplace."

The Congressional Budget office estimates that the farm bill package will cost about \$7 billion over the four-year period.

Senate action on the bill is expected to start about the last week in June. The 1981 Farm Bill is designed to improve on and refine the provisions in the 1977 Farm Bill, which expire September 30.

Helms pointed out, "This is the first time in the history of the Agriculture Committee that we have had to write a Farm Bill under severe budget constraints. In the past, the sky has been the limit."

He said, "This has made our task that much more difficult."

The two weeks of legislative drafting — called "mark-up" — of the Farm Bill came to an end with a vote on a revised compromise on the commodity programs. The compromise reduced the level of budget outlays on many of the programs, which had gone considerably over budget guidelines in earlier considerations.

Helms had earlier told the Senators, "We have marched up the hill (on spending), and now

we're going to have to march back down again."

Helms had special words of praise for Senator Walter "Dee" Huddleston, of Kentucky, the ranking Democrat on the Committee, for his cooperation and assistance in drafting the legislation.

In commenting on some of the major decisions reached by the Committee, Helms said he was especially pleased to have a strong resource conservation title; a food stamp program that incorporates much-needed measures for eliminating fraud, abuse and soaring costs; and commodity programs that contain improvements which make them more effective and should allow for greater opportunities for profits by farmers.

The entire package of conservation proposals in the Helms Farm Bill (S. 884) was accepted by the Committee, along with some additional provisions offered by other Committee members.

Proposals adopted included:

— A Special Areas Conservation Program designed to target technical assistance and funds at localities having the most severe soil and water conservation problems.

— A program to permit the Soil Conservation Service to use volunteers in conservation work.

— Permanent authority in law for the popular Resource Conservation and Development Program.

— Amendments to the Small Watershed Program to speed up the approval process for local soil and water conservation measures, thereby saving local sponsors time and money.

Senator Helms said, "These conservation initiatives are designed to strengthen Soil and Water Conservation Districts' local programs, protecting our valuable soil and water resources that are so vital to producing food and fiber, and maintaining a

favorable balance of trade. In recent years we've tended to ignore these problems, and I welcome the opportunity to return to basics in soil and water conservation."

In the commodity programs, for wheat, feed grains, upland cotton and rice, target prices and loan authority are continued for an additional four years.

Minimum target prices are specified for each year of the bill, with discretionary authority in the Secretary of Agriculture to adjust upward according to change in the cost of production.

A crop-specific acreage reduction program is authorized to replace the current set-aside authority, and a land diversion program is provided.

Minimum target prices and loan levels are:

✓ Wheat: target prices starting at \$4.20 per bushel in 1982 and increasing 20 cents a year through 1985; loan levels of \$3.50 per bushel.

✓ Feed Grains: target prices for corn starting at \$2.80 per bushel in 1982 and increasing 15 cents a year through 1985; loan levels of \$2.60 per bushel for corn. The Secretary shall set comparable levels for other feed grains.

✓ Cotton: target prices of 71 cents per pound for 1982, 76 cents for 1983, 85 cents for 1984, and 93 cents for 1985; loan levels of 55 cents per pound.

✓ Rice: target prices of \$11.23 per hundredweight for 1982, \$12.14 for 1983, \$12.70 for 1984, and \$13.50 for 1985; loan level based on 75 percent of the target price.

Other provisions of the omnibus bill include:

✓ Dairy: price support for milk at between 75 and 90 percent of parity, with a 70 percent minimum if Government costs or purchases of dairy products are projected to exceed certain levels; and semi-annual adjustment on April 1 if necessary to maintain support price at 70 percent.

✓ Peanuts: loan levels of \$831 for quota peanuts the four years; a poundage quota of 1.3 million tons per year; and maintaining the national acreage allotment at 1.6 million acres.

✓ Soybeans: loan level based on 75 percent of recent average soybean market prices, but not less than \$5.02 per bushel.

✓ P.L. 480: an extension of the Food-For-Peace Program for an additional four years; elimination of the spending "cap" on market development, and an increase in the "cap" on humanitarian aid.

✓ Embargo Relief: a strong provision to offer financial relief to agricultural producers through either loans or payments if an embargo is imposed on only agriculture without including other segments of the economy.

✓ Sugar: a price support

program for domestically grown sugar beets and sugar cane with a nonrecourse loan program effective Oct. 1, 1982, at a level of not less than 19.6 cents per pound for raw sugar cane; loans could not be available before the beginning of the fiscal year and would have to mature before the end of that fiscal year.

✓ Export Credit Revolving Fund: establishes authority for such a fund to be used to finance export sales of U.S. agricultural commodities.

On food stamp legislation which was ordered reported as a separate bill, Helms said he was especially pleased that these provisions, which he has sought for some time, were included:

— A "workfare" program under which localities can require able-bodied, working-age recipients of food stamps to perform public service work in return for their stamps.

— Eliminating striking workers from the food stamp roles.

— Increase of penalties for those committing fraud, including permanently eliminating such offenders from the food stamp program after the third offense.

— An income ceiling for food stamp recipients at 130 percent of the federal poverty level.

— A tightening of program rules to include such things as the

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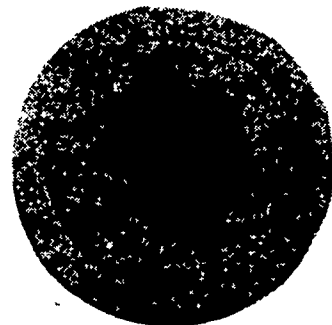
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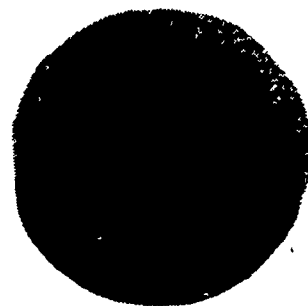
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