

N.E. ag secretaries meeting

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Economics

"We have to cope with a farm fiscal situation that is not good. "Let's not go with an extension of the milk compromise program. "But let's extend one phase of it—the marketing and promotion."

Agriculture secretaries from other states in the Northeast had similar messages for the USDA and Washington, which was represented in the person of Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell, assistant secretary, USDA, and several staff members of the House and Senate ag committees.

Old "Vinegar Bend" fielded the criticisms and barbs in his soft drawly demeanor as craftily as when he came out of the hills of North Carolina into the Major Leagues. He even had a few curves and changes-of-pace of his own.

Stewart N. Smith, Ag Commissioner from Maine, kept lobbying for consideration of creation of something like the Federal Reserve Board for agriculture that would take farm policy out of politics and transcend administrations.

"But there is no such animal," Vinegar Bend said.

"And, I don't think Congress and the President would ever give up enough to have such an animal."

Smith kept returning to the argument that farmers are more affected by "macro-economics" — fiscal decisions like tax codes that are made completely outside the realm of agriculture.

And mixed with an Ag Federal Reserve is the concept of income maintenance for those endangered farmers — the middle family farmers — who lie in the mid-stream of \$10,000 to \$200,000 gross incomes and who are most susceptible to the raging currents of today's ag economy.

Stephen H. Taylor, Ag Commissioner from New Hampshire, lashed out hard at the tax loopholes and investment credits that doctors, dentists and neurosurgeons are continuing to use as write-offs for their non-farm income.

"One of ag's biggest problems remains the tax code," Taylor said.

"I was recently in California and saw another 2,100-cow complex being created.

"These people are not concerned about milk income over production costs.

"They just want to use their farm losses to lay-off on their non-farm income.

"This is the real competition for our family farmers in the Northeast to survive.

"Everyday you see ads in the Wall Street Journal to lease cows.

"That's the new shape of ag today.

"Let's look at that Tax Code and ferret out those abuses."

Joseph Gerace, Ag Commissioner from New York, called

for a Blue Ribbon National Food Policy Panel that would lock itself behind closed doors and come up with some national policy similar to the workings of the recent Social Security panel.

"We must start singing out of the same hymnal when we go to Washington," he stressed.

Vinegar Bend Mizell spoke of the USDA's lengthy "listening session" process of getting regional input for Farm Bill consideration.

Penrose Hallowell, Ag Secretary from Pennsylvania, threw a high, hard challenging pitch to Vinegar Bend:

"I invite the House Ag Committee up to Pennsylvania to hear from some of our farmers," Hallowell said.

"We must look at the world as it is and not as we want it to be," he continued.

"In Pennsylvania, we're opposing a free trade law for Israel because it will put our tomato processing plants right out of business."

Hallowell also had some stern comments about the investment credit situation by non-farm money in ag.

He issued a challenge to Penn State, too.

"They have lots of people still involved in farm production, but we need more full-time university people involved fulltime in ag marketing and promotion."

Robert Gray, of the American Farmland Trust, also had some choice words about how pressure is going to continue on finally getting something really done about erosion.

"Conservation has arrived as a major farm issue," he said.

"Everyone is frustrated about the lack of results in recent conservation programs.

"Erosion in the past decade has been as bad as the Dust Bowl.

"Erosion is highly concentrated. Just six percent of the cropland has 43 percent of the serious erosion."

He referred to the so-called "Sod-Buster" bills.

"We must discourage highly erodible land from coming into production.

"And start doing something about some of this land that has already come into production.

"There must be an economic disincentive to bring and keep this highly erodible land in production."

The ag secretaries from the "forgotten Northeast" also discussed other matters of mutual concern, such as Avian Influenza status and farmland preservation.

But tops on their minds was the message to Washington:

"Hey, don't forget us country kids. Just because we live practically on the same block, it's no reason to continue to ignore us."



Panel discussing "The Northeast Looks at the 1985 Farm Bill" at Ag Secretaries Conference includes, from the left, Stephen H. Taylor, New Hampshire; George Dunsmore, Vermont; Penrose Hallowell, Pennsylvania; and Joseph Gerace, New York.



Symposium of 1985 Farm Bill at Northeast Ag Secretaries Conference includes, seated from the left, Robert Gray, American Farmland Trust; Daryl Nirenberg, Staff, Senate Ag Committee; Bob Bor, Staff, House Ag Committee; Steve McCoy, Staff, House Ag Committee; standing left, Stewart N. Smith, Ag Commissioner, Maine; and Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell, Assistant Secretary, USDA.

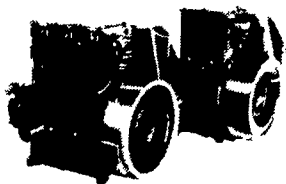
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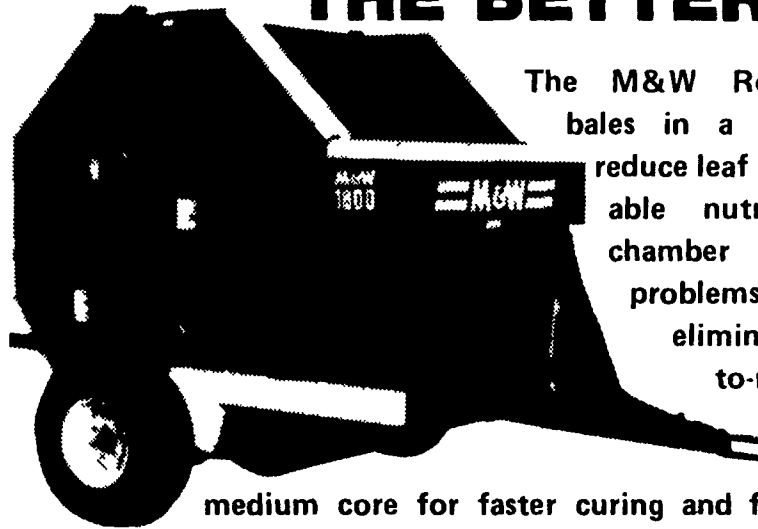
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