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Farmers' support should drop, Harston says

Farmers receiving maximum amounts in government support payments should expect to see them chopped by as much as 60 or 80 per cent in 1974.

This is the studied opinion of Dr. Clive R. Harston of the Agricultural Experiment Station at A&M.

"It is inevitable that the limitation will be lowered with the next farm bill, which is being drafted now," he said. "The question will only be by how much."

Harston, a specialist in agricultural policy in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, explained that a farmer is currently limited to receiving no more than $55,000 in payments for each crop program. Although there is some talk of doing away with support payments altogether, Harston said more realistic estimates suggest a lowering of the ceiling to $20,000 or even to $10,000 per person per crop program.

The $20,000 limitation has already been endorsed by a major farm organization, he explained, and is getting the support of many congressmen considered sympathetic to agriculture.

Why? Harston said limitation concessions are being made in an effort to turn some farm critics into allies.

"Because farm supporters represent such a small minority in Congress, they must of necessity make alliances with other non-farm minorities — groups which would support farm programs on the condition that payment limitations be lowered."

"Some of those who advocate lowering payment ceilings believe such action will save the government a great amount of money," Harston continued. "But it is unlikely that this will happen."

The $55,000 limitation, which has been in effect since 1971, has probably caused no measurable reduction in costs to the federal government, he contended, because it affected very few farmers.

"In Texas, for example, only 235 farm operators were drawing more than $55,000 in any crop program before the limitation was imposed.

A reduction of the payment limit to $20,000 will have a much greater impact on agricultural operations, Harston said.

"This lowering of the [illegible] support ceiling is supposed [illegible] aimed at helping small far[illegible] he explained, "but this will [illegible] the case. As long as pa[illegible] amounts are tied to the qu[illegible] of a product reaching the m[illegible] the income support progra[illegible] be relatively ineffective in h[illegible] them."

Because the big operato[illegible] duces more—seven per cent [illegible] nations' farmers produce h[illegible] agricultural products—he [illegible] ously receives higher suppo[illegible] ments, Harston said.

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