

# National

## Senate farm hearings open

United Press International  
WASHINGTON — The Senate Agriculture Committee has opened hearings on farm and food policies for the next four years with the 14-month-old Soviet grain embargo hanging over its proceedings.

"We no longer have Mr. (Jim-

my) Carter's embargo," American Agriculture Movement Chairman Marvin Meek told the committee Monday. "This is now President Reagan's embargo."

Meek said as long as there is a chance embargos or other disruptions will hamper free trade, farm prices should be indexed to rise

along with farmers' production costs.

Several farm groups have said that if the embargo remains in place, farmers must be compensated by higher price support loan rates in the new four-year farm bill.

Sen. Roger Jepsen, R-Iowa, told Meek he believes Reagan will carry out his campaign pledge to lift the embargo, but the timing will be affected by Soviet actions in Poland and elsewhere.

Carter imposed the embargo last year after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

"President Reagan has assured me personally he has not changed his mind," Jepsen said.

Agriculture Secretary John Block canceled an appearance before the committee scheduled for today. He will appear March 25.

He also canceled a scheduled appearance before the House Agriculture Committee on Wednesday, its opening day of hearings.

Block has indicated he will support eliminating deficiency payments made to farmers of major crops when prices fall below target levels because farmers do not repay that money.

Block is attempting the difficult task of convincing the administra-

tion to go along with what he calls "modest increases" in price support loan rates. That money is repaid to the U.S. Treasury.

In his opening remarks, Senate Agriculture Chairman Jesse Helms, R-N.C., promised a "market-oriented agriculture that emphasizes the private sector" and "fiscal responsibility" in farm and food policies.

Helms made no mention of specifics of a farm bill. The only bill before the committee so far is a proposal by Sen. John Melcher, D-Mont., to raise the price support loan rates to 75 percent of parity, a level that is unlikely to be enacted.

"We can't have a cheap food policy in this country when farmer's costs of production are not met in the marketplace," Melcher said.

Leaders of the National Farmers Organization and the National Grange were the first to testify in the lengthy effort to fashion a farm bill, which is expected to stretch into May.

Ellen Haas, spokeswoman for the Community Nutrition Institute, an advocacy group, testified in opposition to administration proposals to cut spending for food stamps, which also will be included in the bill.

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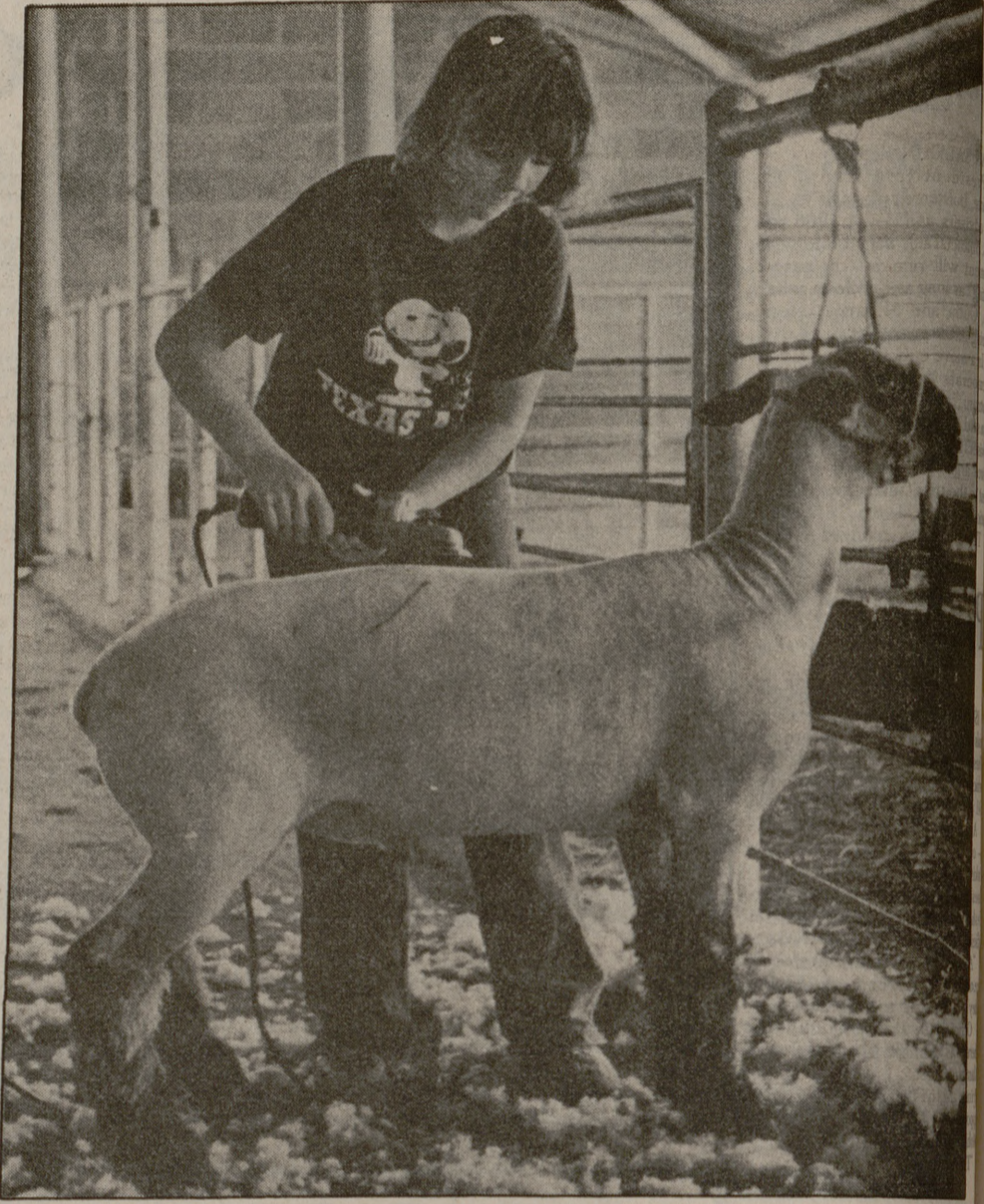
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Jodie Wheeler grooms her entry for the annual Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. She and her family stopped by Texas A&M University on the way to the show. For more about coun- try and western entertainers as well as sheep, pigs and cows in Houston, see Thursday's Focus.

## Charities to give \$1 million back to Energy Department

United Press International  
WASHINGTON — The Energy Department has brought an unusual episode to a close by agreeing to allow four national charities to give the poor \$3 million of \$4 million received from a

departing Carter administration official.

The agreement, reached late last Friday with the National Council of Churches, the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and the Council of Jewish Federa-

tions, was announced Monday at a joint news conference.

Under the accord, the four charities will return \$1 million—\$250,000 each—within 14 days. In return, they will resume distributing the remaining money to help defray winter home-heating bills of the poor.

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"We are glad to be able to resume what we originally intended to do, namely distribute this money to poor people who have need of home heating fuel during the winter season," said Monsie nor Lawrence Corcoran of Catholic Charities. "If you look at the weather, maybe winter is about over."

The terms end a somewhat embarrassing spectacle in which Energy Secretary James Edwards tried to prevent the charities from distributing money recovered in an overpricing action against Standard Oil Co. of Indiana (Amoco).

Paul Bloom, the former department special counsel who engineered the \$100 million overcharge settlement, quietly gave the \$4 million to the charities as his last official act before leaving office with the rest of the Carter administration Jan. 20. The charities promised to distribute the money to the poor by the end of February.

When the new administration discovered Bloom's unorthodox action, the Energy Department wired the charities to freeze the disbursement of funds, already well under way.

Until Friday's settlement, the agency was insisting all unspent money be returned.

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