

Battalion break

Prior to the Texas A&M-University of Houston basketball game Monday, The Battalion served two purposes: entertainment and a comfortable seat for students waiting in front of G. Rollie White Coliseum.

photo by Karen Kaley

Congressmen question federal farm policies

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Members of Congress are skeptical about the Reagan administration's announced policy that the Farmers Home Administration will make every effort to prevent heavily indebted farmers from going broke.

In response to congressional queries based on reports from farmers, Agriculture Secretary John Block and Undersecretary Frank Naylor defended the sincerity of their policy in an appearance on Capitol Hill last week.

They said directors of state Farmers Home offices were called to Washington last week to receive directives on a new policy to give farmers every consideration to keep them in business.

Those directives are expected to be communicated to local offices by this week.

Rep. Bill Alexander, D-Ark., reported that Farmers Home employees in his area had been insensitive to farmers who, because of the weak farm economy, are behind in their payments to the Agriculture Department farm lending agency that holds about 11 percent of farm debt.

What is the administration's "precise policy" on delinquencies, he asked Block when the agriculture secretary appeared before the House appropriations agriculture subcommittee.

"We are not and we do not feel it is appropriate to try and force farmers off the land," Block said.

He said the administration is compassionate and concerned and the number of foreclosures will be quite small.

Alexander asked Block to communicate that attitude to local Farmers Home officials because, he said: "As of now, they're insensitive to these social problems that we're discussing."

Rep. Virginia Smith, R-Neb., spoke of fear and uneasiness among farmers in her district because of forced sales.

Naylor said most of the stories of foreclosures or forced sales prove to be untrue when the facts are checked out.

The agriculture secretary's discretionary authority will be used to keep farmers afloat during their current cash flow difficulties because officials recognize agriculture is the financial base and strength of this nation, he said.

Naylor said the government will make full use of its discretionary authorities, with policies such as deferring loan repayments for three years and then for another three years.

Farmers Home will change its policy and for the first time let farmers pay other lenders be-

fore Farmers Home and permit them to split repayments among Farmers Home and other lenders.

Rep. Jack Hightower, Texas, complained about farmers who could not qualify for loans because of a requirement that they buy a certain amount of crop insurance that could not afford.

Naylor said a new policy would drop that requirement as a condition for loans.

The new Farmers Home policy was announced in Washington earlier this month. Block refused to agree to a one-year moratorium on foreclosures, saying it would be irresponsible but he said farmers would be foreclosed upon only in extreme circumstances.

Block got promises of cooperation from private banks, Farm Credit System banks who said they have plenty of money to help farmers through the current bad times.

Block and Naylor said farmers have cash flow problems but less than 1 percent of 300,000 Farmers Home borrowers have serious problems. Trouble spots are in the High Plains, southern Minnesota, southern Georgia, Mississippi, Michigan and Nebraska scattered counties elsewhere.

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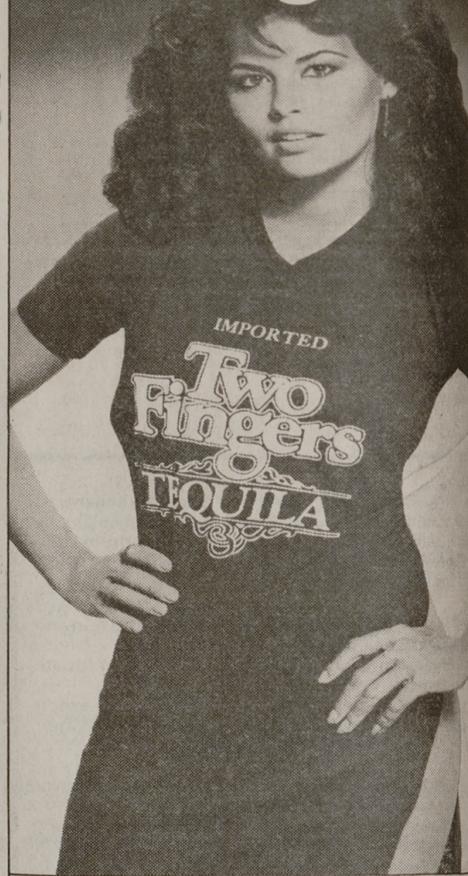
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