

Opinion

Short-term solutions breed long-term agriculture woes

This fall's booming harvest is just one symptom of a booming farm aid budget, which must be reduced if the United States is to become competitive in international markets, and if farmers relying on this aid are to survive what is touted as the worst agricultural crisis since the Depression.

Cheryl Burke
Guest Columnist

Bumper crops of corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton, produced on fewer acres than ever before, have forced Congress to attempt sweeping policy reforms to save the agricultural economy. For decades, agricultural policy has been reactionary, shaped to alleviate an industry's distress — but only temporarily.

When the first federal price-support program was created, in 1933, the secretary of agriculture, Henry Wallace, called it a "temporary method of dealing with an emergency." Through the years, each year, the federal government has continued to deal with farm problems crisis-by-crisis. The short-term solution to each year's emergency has proved to be the long-term downfall of the industry. "Temporary" federal aid is now a permanent economic fixture.

Hundreds of billions of tax dollars later, the farm economy is dependent for survival, less enough prosperity, on a labyrinth of "temporary" programs that have distorted the market. Meanwhile, farm land values are plummeting, the farm credit system is faltering and the federal government is spending record amounts to buy and store the surplus created by this artificial market.

Paradoxically, the farmers in the worst financial shape are the very ones who were supposed to have benefited the most from federal programs. There is simply no export market for subsidized U.S. produce.

The strong dollar compounds the problem of this year's bumper crops by making American trade non-compet-

itive in foreign markets. Competing food-producing nations have taken advantage of the situation, boosting production and slashing prices in response to high-priced U.S. commodities.

When the American farmer can't export his crops at a profit, he sells them to the federal government at subsidized guaranteed prices.

Thus, farm aid expenditures set new all-time highs as the government collects record-level stockpiles of more than 2.05 billion bushels of corn and 369 million bushels of soybeans by 1986.

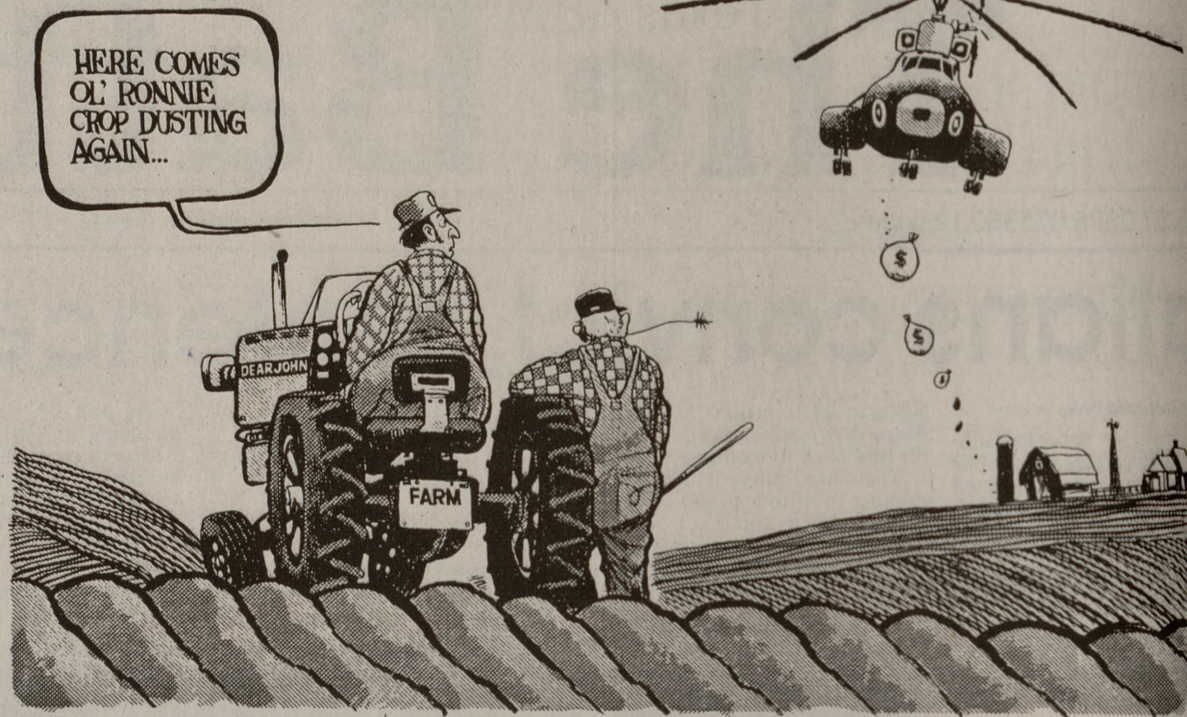
Perhaps most important, it must be realized that this is not a farmer's issue alone. All feel the effects when the nation's largest economic sector suffers. Consumers pay higher prices in a market where competition is stifled. Taxpayers must foot the bill for increasingly expensive farm aid programs. And every side of the industry, from farm equipment manufacturers and dealers to the bankers mortgaging farmland and loaning money, dies a slow death as the American farm is crushed under the weight of its own aid programs.

As this decades-old economic struggle continues, Congress fights another decades-old struggle as it tries to lower the budget and help the farmers simultaneously with the newest farm bill under consideration.

First, these goals are not necessarily a contradiction in terms. While in the short run farmers benefit from aid programs at the expense of consumers and taxpayers, those same farmers have helped cripple their own industry's future. An infusion of still more federal dollars would only worsen the damage. Prices must be lowered to a competitive market level and surpluses reduced before the farmer can become economically independent.

Second, one of the most pervasive myths about agriculture is that farmers cannot survive without federal aid. Only one-third of the nation's producers use

CHAMAN THE OREGONIAN (COP) BY TROBEN MERR



government support. The rest already operate in the free market. New legislation must phase out years of programs that have insulated that one-third of American farmers from the market and have contorted other areas of agriculture.

One means to that end, President Reagan's drastic "market-oriented" proposals of earlier this year, would abandon the farmer to free market competition. While weaning the farmer from federal support and lowering government costs are the eventual goals of all the current farm aid proposals, it must be accomplished slowly.

All groups involved must recognize the free market as an ideal, but temper

its implementation with a gradual decrease of deficiency payments, price supports, production controls and export assistance programs, not by completely pulling the rug out from under farmers on aid.

Reagan's 1981 policy promised to lower federal support and move agriculture toward a free market system, but ended up spending 600 percent more than its planned outlay and was at least three times as expensive as any of its predecessors.

Why did it fail?

It failed because government panicked when faced with the latest crises of farm debt, bankruptcy and overproduction. It will take years to repair the damage created by decades of policy mis-

takes. Government must stand firm in its convictions that the agricultural economy has to move close to the marketplace. And it's just as obvious that time will be required for farmers to work their way back to solid ground.

Estimates show that 15 to 20 percent more farmers are going to go out of business in the next 18 months. Hard as it may seem, those who will survive are those who can control costs and operate in true competition. Government cannot longer bail agriculture out of its economically sinking boat.

It's time to save American agriculture. It's time to force American agriculture to save itself.

Cheryl Burke is a senior agricultural journalism major.

Mail Call

Musical disbelief

EDITOR:

I am writing to express my, as well as many other people's, disbelief in the article that ran in Thursday's Battalion previewing the George Strait concert. Personally, I do not know a lot about music, and I would not have a chance on Name That Tune.

However, concert reviewers should, and two column inches does not tell me much. I've seen Sam Buchmeyer's work before, and this man knows music like David Letterman knows stupid pet tricks. Am I wrong in suspecting that some crazy editing too place?

Mike Cramer

Accompanied by 51 signatures

EDITOR'S NOTE: Yes.

Questions needing answers

EDITOR:

There are a couple of questions that need to be raised about the food services on this campus?

First: Who's making the profits? The food served is essentially fast, frozen food. For the \$4.75 that supper costs, any fast food place in town would stuff you. Maybe they ought to put a Wendy's on campus. . .

Second: Why can't the owner of any 12-meal plan "give" his meals to anyone he chooses? After all, the meals were paid for and sales tax was charged. So where does the money go if the meals are not eaten? Since it is a moral sin to give the meals away, maybe a cumulative refund at the end of the semester or a transfer to the next week's allotment should be considered.

Third: Why does the cafeteria both charge extra (\$6) and offer no seconds on their occasional special meals. One or the other would be entirely sufficient. Besides, the extra cost only affects those who pay cash or are on the point plan.

Fourth: How come the menu is so often wrong? Many times, I have called the menu number and discovered that they were offering some (Oh so rare) really good food and rushed down there to get it only to find out that thirty minutes after they opened, they have "run out" and replaced it (90 percent of the time with chicken nuggets).

Fifth: Why are the managers consistently rude? Nearly all of the workers that I have talked to are very friendly. But when they call a manager, duck and grab the riot gear. The smiles are all gone. And the one time I called their office, the man who answered became instantly rude. Who knows? Maybe the sour personality just comes from trying to get the most money out of college kids that they can with the minimum amount of effort and cost.

The Department of Food Services should be a little more flexible with the students. We are paying customers after all, and it would be nice to be treated like one.

David Pattillo '89

Leave our name out of it

EDITOR:

This letter is in reference to a letter written by Mike A. Davis '86 in which he refers to the Society of Black Engineers as a racist organization.

Davis, the Texas A&M University Chapter of The National Society of Black Engineers is not in any way, shape, form or fashion a racist organization. Proof of this is found in our national constitution.

Article III, Section 1:

"Membership and participation shall be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, ethnic group or national origin."

To be a full-fledged member in our organization you only need to pay your dues and be enrolled in an accepted engineering curriculum. We also have provisions for non-engineering majors.

Our meetings are open to anyone that would like to listen to speakers, attend programs and our general meetings.

So, Davis, I cannot speak for the other organizations you mentioned, but I can speak on behalf of NSBE when I ask that in your future writings that you do not mention our name without having all of your facts together about our organization.

'Dedicated to a better tomorrow'

Kenneth Johnson '86

President '85-'86

NSBE

Write it elsewhere

EDITOR:

My friend and I would like to lodge a serious complaint upon the shoulders of the "true" Aggies. We live in the Commons, and seeing as how we own cars, we park in the red lot behind the Commons. Our complaint goes out to all the (apparently) jealous people who walk through the lot scratching cars, writing in the dust on the hood and sliding their keys along car doors.

This is destruction of other people's property! I guess we held the false thought that Ags were honest and true. If this were so, why are there scratches along our car doors? Why is there an "R" carved in my doors? Why is "Fish '89" written on my friend's hood? Writing in the fog on windows is one thing, but writing in the dust that has settled on a car is quite another. For everyone's benefit, it scratches the paint. We don't know who has done these "wonderful" things, but we feel it is wrong and it should stop.

For all concerned, we believe these people are jealous of nice cars (Cutlasses, Jeeps, Camaros, etc.) because they don't do anything to the other cars (Toyotas, excluding Supras; Volkswagens, Tempos, etc.). Come on, Ags, this has to stop!

Destroying other people's property is against everyone's moral values; or at least it should be. We are glad you're proud of your initials and your class but please, write it somewhere else, not on everyone's cars.

Elaine Pahmiyer '88

Angie Buechler '87

Not just 'beating with sticks'

EDITOR:

First of all, we would like to thank you for a generally accurate article on our group, the Society for Creative Anachronism. We especially appreciate your resisting the urge to portray us as cultists or eccentrics.

However, there are a few points we would like to make in reference to that article — one major, the others less so.

The major point concerns "fighting." Assuming the quote from Matt Birkner was accurate, it seems he gave a false impression in his attempt at a simple explanation. The phrase "hitting each other over the head with sticks until one gives up," gives a totally false impression of how and why we fight.

Safety features for fighting include special rules

for the construction of "swords" (rattan, bound in strapping and duct tape) to prevent splintering, rigid armor standards, experienced observers for each bout to watch for spectators and equipment failure and personalized training for each would-be warrior.

The description also does disservice to the skills of those engaged in fighting. Twenty years of research and practical experience by society members has resulted in an accurate re-creation of medieval warfare. Some warriors have incorporated the modern Japanese martial art of kendo, "the way of the sword," into their fighting. Metropolitan police forces have asked SCA members to train their officers to use their officers to use their batons. This is far cry from "beating each other with sticks."

Another point we would like to make is that the author (or perhaps those he interviewed) glossed over the depth of research undertaken by SCA members. We do not just "make our own costumes;" we study and work to recreate, sometimes on a professional quality level, medieval crafts. These include fiber arts (weaving, spinning, embroidery, lacemaking, sewing), metalworking (weapons, armor, utensils, as well as gold, silver, bronze and copper jewelry). Woodworking (utensils, weapons, furniture, siege towers, catapults), dancing, falconry, heraldry, entertainment ("bardic" arts — singing, storytelling, poetry), brewing and winemaking (wine-making), cooking and, as mentioned in the article, calligraphy. Many of our local people have kingdomwide reputations for their skill in one or more of these crafts.

Speaking of our kingdom, its name is "Ansteorra." This means "one star," and is a regional division of our international organization. (We have members in Germany and Australia and aboard the U.S.S. Nimitz.

Please do not take these comments personally or feel we do not appreciate the article. It is just that, being a group of people who act and dress differently at times, we are sensitive to being misunderstood. Thank you for listening.

Stephen Williams
Katie Maginn
Michael Brown
Allen and Nancy Hurst

The Battalion

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Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the Editorial Board or the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

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