

Congress criticizes USDA House committee calls farm disaster relief insufficient

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Agriculture Department came under attack Tuesday, as members of the House Agriculture Committee assailed the USDA for failing to provide adequate financial relief to farmers whose crops were hit by floods, drought and other disasters.

But several committee members also blamed Congress, which has been unable to decide which program it favors — crop insurance or disaster assistance.

Farmers also have not embraced the crop insurance program, with less than half signing up for crop coverage, Oklahoma Democrat Glenn English noted.

"We have to design a better program," Rep. Charles Stenholm, D-Stamford, said. "We cannot continue to have two."

Keith D. Bjerke, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, said he also wants a streamlined program.

"We want one program. Not two," Bjerke said. "Having both continues to be a nightmare for us."

Congress voted 12 years ago to terminate the disaster assistance program in favor of crop insurance, but since then periodically has appropriated funds for specific disasters.

Late last year, Congress appropriated \$995 million in disaster aid for crop losses due to bad weather in 1990 or 1991.

Farmers have until March 13 to apply for the aid.

That funding has caused the current wrangling around the country, as farmers fight for their share of a pie who all agree is far too small.

Some experts estimate up to \$7 billion in disaster aid is needed.

The current funding is "grossly insufficient to cover the extreme crop damage we have had so far," said Rep. Jim Chapman, D-Sulphur Springs.

Payments will be pro-rated among eligible farmers once all applications are in later this month, since there is not enough disaster aid to satisfy all qualified applicants.

The National Farmers Union fears farmers could end up with as little as 30 cents for every dollar they are qualified to receive.

Bjerke repeatedly told the committee he was unable to estimate what the pro-rated factor will be.

"I submit to you there is no possible way for that calculation to be made at this time," he said.

Bjerke, prepared for a hostile round of questioning Tuesday, opened his testimony by saying, "Maybe unfortunately, or fortunately as the case may be, I did not bring my letter of resignation."

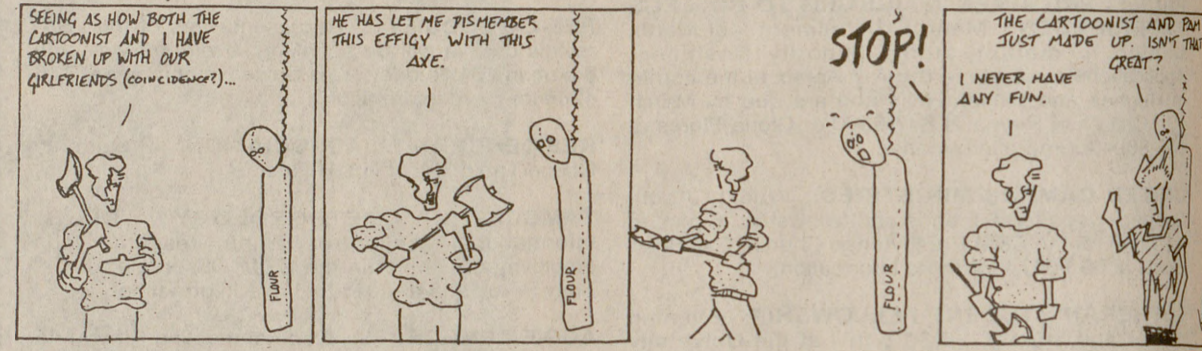
Although Bjerke faced some tough questions on specific issues, several members praised the ASCS' performance.

Spade Phillips, P.I.

by Matt Kowalski



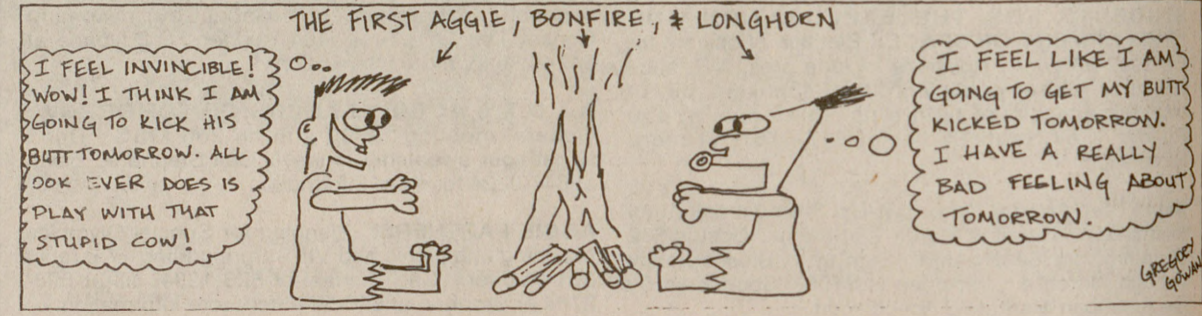
(the story so far...)



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UT faculty declines proposal for multicultural curriculum

AUSTIN (AP) — The University of Texas professor who headed a committee that proposed requiring freshmen to study multicultural courses says he will try to get the idea adopted on a college-by-college basis at the university.

A faculty vote announced Monday defeated the proposal to require students to study U.S. minorities or a Third World culture. The total was 759-434.

Emotions ran high as the results were announced at a Faculty Senate meeting, with some students walking out and many faculty members sighing with relief.

"Texas is in its normal position, bringing up the rear," said UT journalism Professor Wayne Danielson, who was chairman of the committee that proposed multicultural courses.

"It's obvious where the voting block was — engineering and the sciences," said Danielson, who said he would now try to get the proposal approved on a college-by-college basis.

But other students and faculty members liked the outcome. "We should deal with what students need to know and not what political agendas dictate," said psychology professor Joseph Horn.

"This is a tremendous victory for students and relevant education," said Ed Sullivan, chairman of the Young Conservatives of Texas.

Texas has been considering multicultural courses since racial incidents on campus in 1990 caused lingering tensions. The proposal drew opposition from some professors who said the reform was part of a movement

by campus liberals to politically indoctrinate students.

Last year, a committee proposed focusing English composition classes on racism and sexism, but the ensuing opposition ultimately caused the committee to resign.

Under the latest proposal, all undergraduates entering after fall 1992 would have taken three hours of courses on U.S. minorities or Third World or non-Western cultures. Students entering after fall 1996 would have had to take three hours on U.S. minorities as well as three hours on Third World or non-Western cultures.

Many at Monday's meeting questioned voting irregularities, saying the election should be thrown out because it did not afford all faculty members the same method of casting ballots.

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