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Boswell Stevens testimony

Arthur Boswell Stevens

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To The Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture and Forestry:

I am Boswell Stevens, a farmer of Macon, Mississippi, and President of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.

We thank you most sincerely for the opportunity to appear before your Committee. You were kind to let us appear at this hearing especially as we were not able to be heard at Alexandria, Louisiana, on the 9th and 10th of November.

We feel, however, that we had a valid reason for requesting this opportunity here rather than at Alexandria. We were in our annual meeting at which time the official voting delegates from each of the 82 county Farm Bureaus are assembled and our state policies are determined and the recommendations made to the American Farm Bureau Federation.

We believe the policies determined are the thinking of the vast majority of our membership due to the democratic procedure we pursue to determine the majority opinion.

This statement seems to be verified by the growth of our organization since I became its president in 1950. At that time, we had slightly more than 16,000 members. In 1955, we have 46,274 farm families as members of the Mississippi Farm Bureau - a county Farm Bureau in each of the 82 counties against 54 county Farm Bureaus in 1950.

From the information and the interest shown, it seems safe to assume we will have more than 50,000 members in 1956.

For your information we would like to explain our method of arriving at the opinions of our members. Under our by-laws it becomes the duty of the President to appoint the members of the State Resolutions Committee. This task has been simplified some by the suggestion of one of the former members of the Resolutions Committee in that one person is appointed from each of the 20 districts that the Farm Bureau has divided the state into, based on potential members in such districts. Even with this guide, care must be taken that the Committee is fairly

appointed by interest, not allowing the Committee to become over-balanced with representatives from a single segment of our varied agriculture.

There is also appointed, in addition to the 20 representatives from the districts, five women on the Committee. These five usually represent the state and four district coordinators between the Farm Bureau and the Home Demonstration Council. This organization has approximately 25,000 members throughout the width and breadth of the state. We find that we can work very closely together and they are most helpful in legislative matters.

This State Resolutions Committee meets from four to six weeks prior to the annual meeting to review county Farm Bureau recommendations and to have before it representatives of various organizations and agencies, trying to arrive at the best recommendations to propose to the delegates. After the Committee has spent sufficient time in reviewing recommendations and resolutions and hearing testimony, they put into printed form the state's recommendations. These are prepared and sent to the County Farm Bureaus to be studied by the membership. They can amend, delete or oppose any section or sections, or the suggestions in their entirety.

Their voting delegates are instructed on what position to take on each topic. The last day of the state meeting is the business session. The voting delegates from the 82 counties, who had been selected by the membership in the counties, in proportion to the membership in the county, are approved by the Credentials Committee and seated.

The Resolutions Committee has been in session many times to review any change or deletions and additions since sending the proposals to the counties.

On Thursday, November 10th, the delegates determined the 1956 policies of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.

Cotton continues to be our number one money crop; therefore, I would like to quote you the opinion of these delegates with comment and briefly refer to other interests of our agricultural economy:

"We recognize fully the impact of synthetics, foreign and domestic, and foreign cotton acreage expansion on our long-time historical share of the world

cotton market. We are unable to visualize the recapture and maintenance of our share of the total market without meeting price competition. Price competition can be provided in either of three ways: by the producer, by the government, or by both in cooperation. High cotton production costs, brought about by government action in minimum wages, tariffs and other concessions to labor and industry, so handicap the United States producer that he is unable to make the necessary price adjustments to meet this competition alone. Since the situation is primarily the result of government action, particularly the restrictive sales policies of the State Department, government must assume its share of the pricing necessary to recapture and maintain our share of the world cotton industry. We insist that the government develop, announce, and carry out a cotton export sales program to accomplish this end in cooperation with price adjustments by the producer. Any failure of immediate satisfactory administrative action on a cotton export sales program should be remedied by mandatory legislation by the Congress. Any such announcement, or necessary legislative action, must provide adequate protection for domestic cotton mills through import quotas or tariff regulations. In order to provide the producer's part of price adjustment in the cotton export market, and to meet the competition of domestic synthetics, we recommend that the basis for application of cotton support prices be changed from 7/8" middling to 1" middling and price supports be retained at 90% of parity through the set aside or by legislation, and that compensating increases in acreage allotments be made above that provided in the law.

We urge legislation to prevent cotton of less than 1" in staple being tendered for certificated stock purposes on any Exchange or Board of Trade in the United States, and that on the application of such legislation the CCC clean up the current certificated stocks.

We urge legislation requiring labeling of fabrics to indicate the fiber content.

We deplore the actions of private American capital in expanding old, and developing new, cotton producing areas in foreign countries under the protection

of our price support umbrella in competition with United States producers for the world export market as detrimental not only to cotton producers but to our entire economy.

We are opposed to the granting of intransit rates on cotton produced out of state to Mississippi warehouses, except in cases where transit rates are now in effect, as destroying the effect of our bale identification program, and as taking needed storage space for our Mississippi crop.

We will oppose tolls on navigable streams as injurious to our agricultural economy in raising the prices of farm products through increased delivery costs."

Cotton farmers are as all other people and would like to have as high income as is possible to have, but we must be realistic. They are quite sure now if we are to have any future as cotton producers we must regain our foreign trade and also increase our domestic consumption.

Our people believe we must offer for export a quality product at a *competitive* ~~competitive~~ price.

It is quite apparent that we have lost many of our former accounts and now to regain this trade we must offer special inducements, either in quality or price or both.

There are other legislative acts that we believe will help:

1. The Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act should be vigorously pushed and liberalized.
2. PL 480 has great possibilities and with the agricultural attaches now under the Department of Agriculture there should be a renewed effort to regain exports of agricultural products.
3. Buy American Act should be repealed.
4. Subsidy for American shipping should be in the form of a direct subsidy if needed and not a subterfuge.
5. Sufficient credit for exporter is desirable.

6. Bill No. S 2170 should be enacted to permit reasonable substitution.

7. There will be other bills introduced which will help us accomplish the end we desire and we hope every one will exert every effort to pass such legislation.

There is much talk of the two-price system. With this we cannot agree. To hold the domestic price at a high level and export price at a lower level would be unfair to our own mills and our consumer and at the same time open the doors wider for expansion of the man-made fiber field.

It is unfortunate that there has developed two factions regarding prices. One, the high rigid and the other, the flexible - each claiming to be the salvation of the farmer.

These ~~have~~ ^{have} been talked about so much that many people have lost sight that there can be any other solution.

The philosophy of the American farmer is to produce and produce abundantly, but with tremendous surpluses we realize we must curtail production to permit absorption of the surpluses.

We approve in principal the idea of the soil fertility bank. It is more feasible to spend a reasonable amount of money to build fertility in the soil for an emergency than to pay fixed warehouse charges and have the products go out of condition.

We quote our 1956 resolution regarding same:

"We recognize that many problems would arise, and inequities result in the application of diverted acreage controls. However, the non-basics, with 0-90% support prices based on supply, must have some protection from the production of diverted acres of the 75-90% supported basics when controls are applied. Therefore we prefer and endorse the "Soils Bank" concept for absorbing a large portion of diverted acres to reduce overall production to meet real market demand. The application of the "Soils Bank" concept must not be rigid enough to legislate

scarcities to the extent that we price our market high enough to lose present export markets or encourage importation to meet domestic needs. Rentals must be commensurate with those prevailing in the several basic commodity areas and on a voluntary basis. Concessions as to percentage of acreage, price, and penalties should be provided for the smaller farms. Historical plantings of non-basics and the relative supply of basics should be considered in historical commodity areas in determining the duration and cancellation of rental contracts. Present legislation for production controls and price supports should be continued after the adoption and application of the "Soils Bank" concept except as provided for in other sections of these resolutions."

Few farmers can afford to take diverted acres out of production with no income from these acres, yet, if not restricted, we could find ourselves faced with enormous surpluses in other fields that the same isn't true at the present time.

Our dairy industry is in better position than we found ourselves in a year ago. We have no direct resolution regarding this position, but I being a dairyman also have checked with many dairymen and all agree that we are in a better position. Most dairymen in our state are worrying for fear that too many will now go back into or go into the dairy business.

I have just attended the Executive Committee meeting of the American Dairy Association. Representatives from 44 of the 48 states were in attendance officially at this meeting. Representatives of many other dairy organizations were in attendance. It was the sentiment of all that the dairy industry was in a healthier position than had been the case for several years and all hoped no change would take place legislatively.

Beef cattle production, though not comparable with the war years when every business man, lawyer or doctor went into the business, seems to have stabilized; and the real cattleman seems to be settling down to a normal operation.

We hope the next Congress will provide a method to allow farmers to grow small grains for their own need regardless of quota provisions in the event he uses

this production on his own farm - not to be sold or a loan made for the commodity. This plan, in the south, would not take any market from the producers of these grains, but would allow the farmer to maintain his cattle in a better physical condition.

Our agriculture is varied and we can grow many crops and produce livestock in abundance, all of which will be needed in a long range program as our population increases and our farmers become fewer in numbers.

Much has been said about small farmers. Certainly a farmer who has ability should be provided the tools in the form of adequate credit to convert the small unit into a larger unit that could be made economically sound.

We continue to approve an expanded program for research and education. Many farmers through commodity organizations are making contributions to research and education, but limited income and so widely scattered they must rely on government for more of this program.

We continue to support rural roads and truck line highway system, REA, and farmer cooperatives. Farmers must preserve the right to do collectively for themselves what they can't do alone.

The growing and protection of timber should be encouraged. Adequate appropriation for research to control insects and diseases in our forests should be provided.

One of our youngest agricultural enterprises in Mississippi is the production of tung oil. This was encouraged by the government during the war years to produce sufficient amount of high grade oil for defense need. Today, importation of these oils is a very serious threat to these producers.

We thank you again for the privilege of appearing. We know you gentlemen have a Herculean task, but we have every confidence in your ability to solve the problems.