

Family Farm Defenders

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FFD Mission
Family Farm Defenders is a tax-deductible non-profit activist organization made up of farmers and concerned consumers. We are seeking ways to bring fair prices back to farmers and to insure a safe and sustainably produced food for consumers.

FFD President's Message

By: Joel Greeno, Kendall, WI
President of Family Farm Defenders



The Endless Cycle of Farm Crisis Continues

The endless cycle of farm crises continues. Why is it that we can't escape these cycles of bad news? Why is it that we can't return to the "glory days" of the 1970s? Is it happenstance? Just the way it is? Or - even worse - is the current crisis facing US agriculture by design? Some of the answers may lie in history. And, if we forget history, history may repeat itself even worse. So how has politics shaped US agriculture? Maybe a walk through history could shed some light on how things have gotten so bad and so out of control.

Capper-Volstead

Capper-Volstead came into play in 1922. This is the law that allowed our co-ops to form, and gave farmers a way to insure adequate farm-gate prices. And let's be clear - this did not come easy. A lot of farmers got their noggins thumped, creating the first co-ops and finding markets for their products. It took a lot of intestinal fortitude and dogged determination to get this done. As a result over time agriculture flourished in the United States through until about the 1970s. So what happened? Where did things go wrong? I'm going to start in the early 1960s as to when things began to go seriously wrong - or at least the thought process that began to take us off the rails.

Commission on Economic Development - 1960s

In the early 1960s a wonky think tank called the Commission on Economic Development published a paper. The commission's primary focus was on labor organizing and unions, but with implications for farmers and agriculture. The commission was concerned about the growing strength of workers. They felt that the best way to slow their progress was to start to flood the labor market and the best way to do that was to force farmers off the land. (Continued on pg. 3)



2018 - The Long Ongoing Fight for A Fair Price for Milk

Like a tube of toothpaste, the paper argued that you shouldn't have to squeeze too hard, but if farmers resisted more extreme pressure might be needed. So began the process of driving farmers off the land - the "Unsettling of America" that Wendell Berry wrote about.

1970s Nixon Administration

Then in the 1970s, along came the Nixon administration with Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz and aide Peter Flanagan, and their courtship of large scale corporate farming. Earl Butz coined the phrase "Get big or Get Out" and pushed the notion of "Cheap Food to Feed the World." Peter Flanagan, a Wall Street banker, wrote his own policy paper, supporting corporate agribusiness. The theme of the Flanagan report was to starve New Deal farm programs and try to drive smaller "inefficient" family farms into bankruptcy - essentially, stacking the deck for "Get Big or Get Out." Despite this tilt of the scales against them, many farmers persisted until

the late 1970s when high interest rates and declining commodity prices began to take their toll. A little side note is that during the tail end of Nixon's Presidency, AMPI cooperative out of Texas had given \$2 million in campaign contributions to both the Democratic and Republican Parties. Though it was not part of Watergate per say, the shenanigans surrounding this money helped expose the scandal - the crazy role of agriculture in U.S. politics..

Federal Parity

At least the remnants of federal parity kept many farmers afloat - parity being the principle that farmers should receive a fair market price covering their cost of production, adjusted for inflation. But then Reagan was elected and set us on the path of destruction and chaos. Reagan probably did the most to create the conditions leading to the massive farm losses we now see in the U.S. Reagan's first major act as President was to cut the size of the Dept. of Justice to 1/8

of its former size, thus DOJ's lack of oversight in corporate America and U.S. agriculture to date. Reagan's second major act was to end parity for farmers.

No More Pay Adjustments

So no more pay adjustments at the rate of inflation. Now with rapid price drops and extremely high rates of interest, farmers went out of business at a rapid pace. Every sector of agriculture lost half of its farm's during the 1980s farm crisis. The rapid decline of farms has not stopped since this era. Then came the 1996 Freedom to Farm bill, nicknamed the Freedom to Fail bill. This bill was meant to just let farmers farm without price supports or any other restrictions or assistance. Just milk more cows, raise more cattle and pigs, and grow corn and beans from fence row to fence row. Well, needless to say farmers failed.

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