FFD President’s Message
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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 a 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)