

Farmers stage funeral to see Bergland

By Amy Lenzen

Farm strikers demanded representation at a meeting and press conference attended by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland.

Bergland was in Lincoln as part of a five-state tour to push President Carter's new farm program.

He described the program to Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service Office personnel at a Tuesday dinner and to the press during a conference Wednesday morning.

Despite original announcements that these events were closed to the public, arrangements were made for five American Agriculture supporters to attend.

The arrangements followed a mock funeral, symbolizing the death of the American farmer, staged by about 100 American Agriculture supporters in the Lincoln Hilton lobby.

Some supporters followed Bergland to the eighth floor, however, they disputed reports that they had demonstrated and said it was simply a gathering.

Dale Ebberts of DeWitt said if the group had been

denied entry to either the meeting or the press conference, they were prepared to go "one step further."

He would not elaborate but claimed "this organization has the potential for violence."

Dean Zimmerman, also of DeWitt, said: "We would have demonstrated." He said they would have used signs and snowballs.

A demonstration in Amarillo, Texas, where Bergland was hit with an egg, hurt the movement, Bergland said.

But "at least they got on the news," one striker said.

Strike supporters at the press conference complained that the movement is not getting enough attention. "We were in Washington for two weeks, and the guys who were there for one day got more attention that we did," said supporter Archie Rickertsen of Dickens.

Bergland praised the movement in his concluding remarks at the conference. "The farm strike movement is never over and it has accomplished a great deal," he said.

"I encourage farmers to stay active. To stay active, to be heard—that's the nature of a democracy," Bergland said.



Photo courtesy University of Nebraska
U.S. Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland

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