

Congressman offers plan to preserve family farm

By Val Swinton

Rep. Thomas Harkin, D-Iowa, outlined Friday a nine-point program which he claimed will reverse the current trend away from the family farm in the United States.

Harkin delivered his address during the fourth annual Hendricks Symposium sponsored by the UNL Political Science Department Thursday and Friday in Lincoln.

Harkin, a member of the House Agriculture Committee, said the committee is beginning to take a more general attitude towards farm policy, instead of addressing just pricing of farm commodities.

The congressman said the committee concentrated on pricing because that was exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committee.

"We have jurisdiction over that, and don't want to share it with other committees," he said. "What's happened then, many of us are saying now perhaps the problems of agriculture go beyond just pricing."

Outnumbered

In outlining his nine-point plan, Harkin expressed the need to cooperate with other committees in order to benefit the farmer. He said the committee used to be content

in its own little niche, concerning itself with problems it had exclusive jurisdiction over.

"But when you've got 90 congressmen out of 435, that's a bad attitude to take," he said.

Currently, only 90 congressmen represent rural areas in the house. Harkin also expressed doubt that Congress would increase farm price supports.

"I've always been a proponent of 100 percent parity," he said. "But we won't get 100 percent of parity. We won't get 90 percent of parity. We won't get 80 percent of parity. Congress won't substantially increase farm price supports."

Harkin's nine-point program includes a taxing policy which discourages absentee land ownership and changes inheritance tax laws so family farms can stay in the family. He said he also favors a graduated farm program, much like the graduated income tax program used in the United States.

Need Robin Hood

"Now, the bigger you get, the more you get," he said. "All price support mechanisms only reduce risk. That's the key to expansion, forcing out the smaller farmer."

Harkin's plan would also prohibit, under any circumstances, foreign ownership of American farmland.

"That's not much of a problem right now," he said. "But the potential is there so that in just ten years it could result in a drastic change in ownership of our farmland."

Harkin would also establish a special money pool to help young farmers get started and compete against more established ones and his policy would also encourage land conservation.

"In 100 years of farming, nearly one third of our topsoil has been lost," he said.

Alcohol freak

Harkin said his policy would recognize that farmland can be used for the production of fuel as well as food.

"I happen to be an alcohol freak," he said. "Not in the terms of drinking, but to replace our petroleum base."

The Iowa congressman said a relatively small number of farmers could produce enough grain for alcohol to make a significant dent in gasoline needs, while still leaving enough farmland to produce an adequate amount of food for the country.

The last two points in Harkin's program would reduce expenditures for agriculture research and extension and use the money to help the family farmer. The final point would establish a national grain board, for

the purpose of selling grain to foreign countries.

"I believe our attitude on farm policy must be broad and comprehensive," he said. "If the old policy is continued we're doomed."

Building bridges

Harkin said his program would require the cooperation of other congressional committees, and said with the influx of several new members on the Agricultural Committee, that committee is now "building bridges" with other members of congress.

Harkin was critical of the recent tractorcade to Washington, D.C., sponsored by the American Agriculture Movement.

"I think the effect was all negative," he said. "And again, this has a big effect on Congress." Harkin said television stations carried a story showing a group of farmers sitting in a mobile home, "drinking beer and having a gay old time."

"We're trying to build bridges with our urban cousins," he said. "But we're seeing a lot of it damaged by a very minute few."

Harkin added "Only 90 out of 435 congressional seats are rural, so we just don't have the horse power. If we're going to get our point across, we must have their help."

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