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THE PUBLIC INTEREST
IN AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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In the eyes of farmers, farm organization leaders, and policymakers, the 1970s represented a turning point in the way farm policy is made. Since the Great Depression the agriculture committees, farm organizations, and agriculture secretary had determined farm policy. Not only did they have the ultimate say in what policies were implemented, they controlled the agenda of issues that arose (Paarlberg 1980). It was, in fact, the loss of control of the agenda that resulted in many issues rising to the surface that had not previously been publicly discussed. This loss of control was not just the result of the organization of various so-called public interest groups such as the Agriculture Accountability Project or the Consumer Federation of America, it was facilitated and fostered by a series of redistricting decisions requiring that representatives be apportioned on the basis of population.

Yet the degree to which agriculture has lost control of decisions is still subject to debate. Congressmen from states having strong agricultural interests still control agriculture committees and subcommittees. However, the reality is that today there may be more division within agriculture over the future direction of policy. The public interest lobby feeds on this division, finds comfort and, at times, alliances in it.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the nature of the public interest lobby, its interaction with the farm bloc, and its impact upon the future of farm policy--including the 1985 farm bill debate.

The Public Interest

Perhaps the best starting point for this discussion is to ask what constitutes the public interest. To many agriculturists, the public interest is everything that is not the farmer interest. Public interest concerns, they believe, have an identity with anti-farmer concerns such as the wish to

ban ethylene dibromide from use as a fumigant, prohibit smoking in public, increase the size of the food stamp program, establish a right to food, give animals more rights, prevent farmers from selling prime farmland to developers, and increase domestic and foreign "give-away" programs. Such special interests may or may not be in the public interest.

Public interest means to benefit society as a whole as opposed to a particular segment of society (Auerbach et al. 1961). To an economist, the public interest may raise images of attempts to achieve Pareto optimality--the state of welfare optimum wherein it is impossible to make someone better off without making someone else worse off. Yet in reality there are few such public policy choices. Issues of the need to compensate those made worse off (minimizing the impact of the Russian grain embargo) or compare the costs versus the benefits (the increased cost of beef versus the risk of using DES) invariably arise (Reder 1947). A requirement for interpersonal comparisons and value judgments invariably exists. It is an awareness of this requirement that makes it so difficult to define what constitutes the public interest in agricultural policy or, for that matter, what constitutes a public interest lobbyist.

The Public Interest Lobby

To avoid becoming mired in semantics, this paper defines the overall public interest lobby as composed of groups that represent interests other than those expressed by farmers and agribusiness firms. There is a very large number of such groups.

For purposes of discussion and simplification, the public interest lobby will be categorized into five groups, the consumer, food safety, nutrition, hunger and environmental lobbies. Each of these groups is sufficiently interesting and unique to warrant description and to explain its relation to farm policy issues. (For greater detail see Knutson et al. 1983, 78-87.)

The consumer lobby acts as a sort of public interest blanket covering the wide range of agricultural and food policy issues. The organizations that encompass the consumer lobby will, therefore, be subsequently referenced as having specific public interests such as hunger or food safety. Some of the major members of the consumer lobby are discussed below.

The Consumer Federation of America (CFA) encompasses a federation of primarily consumer interest groups including credit unions, electric cooperatives, and labor unions, as

well as state and city consumer associations. Interestingly, the National Farmers Union (a general farm organization) is also a member of CFA. Some will recall that Carol Foreman, the former assistant secretary of agriculture, rose to that position from the presidency of CFA. It is worth noting that Carol is still a force in agricultural and food policy development from her position as the co-chairman, with Bob Bergland, of the food and agriculture project in the Center for National Policy. She is also a policy advisor to the Mondale campaign. Among the public interest organizations, CFA has, perhaps, the broadest interest in agricultural and food policy issues. Its basic goal is to change USDA from a department of agriculture to a department of food --an orientation which has raised the ire of several farm groups, particularly the National Cattlemen's Association and the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The Consumer Nutrition Institute (CNI) is an applied research and information-oriented consumer lobbying group. Its head, Rob Leonard, served in USDA as an administrator of its food and marketing programs during the Kennedy-Johnson years. CNI has traditionally placed the bulk of its efforts on food and nutrition programs, although it has also played a major advocacy role on issues of milk prices, sugar policy, and marketing orders.

The Public Voice for Food and Agriculture is a consumer lobbying group spinoff from CNI. Its head, Ellen Hass, was a leading consumer advocate on CNI. The Public Voice has broad interest in agricultural and food issues. It appears to be particularly coalition-oriented and readily works with agribusiness groups who have developed concerns about agricultural policy issues.

Other groups with an important consumer public interest focus include Consumers Union, Ralph Nadar's Congress Watch, and several of the major labor unions. It will be recalled that the longshoremen's union as well as the AFL-CIO played an important role in expressing concern about rising food prices during the 1970s and the imposition of grain export embargoes in 1974, 1975 and 1980. Even when the Soviets shot down the Korean airliner, it will be recalled that questions were raised as to whether the longshoremen would load grain on ships bound for the Soviet Union. Major unions have, of course, also been a significant force in the organization of farm workers.

The food safety lobby. Food safety is perhaps the oldest of the public interest lobbying causes. Initial actions to ensure a safe food supply were concentrated at the state and local level. However, public outrage developed over the

unsanitary conditions described in the book, The Jungle, by Upton Sinclair. As a result, the federal government got involved in food safety issues with the passage of the Meat Inspection Act in 1906. As food processing became increasingly complex, regulations likewise increased in complexity. The original 1938 Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act was amended in 1958 by the stringent zero-tolerance Delaney clause completely prohibiting the use of additives found to induce cancer in man or animal. Equally controversial restrictions were subsequently placed on the use of pesticides having potential adverse effects on health and safety.

One of the more interesting aspects of the history of food safety regulation has been the tendency to move or center regulatory authority outside the USDA. This reflects, at least in part, a general lack of confidence in the ability of the secretary of agriculture to regulate in the public interest.

The food safety lobby is an interesting combination of scientifically and environmentally based advocates. The scientific base is a necessity in light of the complexity of food safety issues. Two major food safety interest groups are described below.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest received contemporary attention for questions raised concerning the safety of the new no-calorie sweetener, aspartame. Likewise the Center has been involved in issues such as the relationship between nitrites and cancer, the use of growth stimulants in livestock production, and the use of antibiotics in confinement feeding of livestock and poultry. However, it has also spoken out on such diverse issues as corporate investment in agriculture and conflicts of interest arising from agribusiness and farm organization officials serving in USDA policymaking positions.

The Health Research Group is a Nader organization related to Congress Watch. Its primary concern has been with the safety of food additives. It has been very critical of the procedures and scientific staff of FDA and USDA on food safety issues. It has advocated a policy of considering all substances "generally recognized as safe" (GRAS) as potentially dangerous unless proven otherwise.

The nutrition lobby, since it deals primarily with issues involving the relationship between diet and health, has obvious close ties to the food safety lobby. In fact, nutrition issues might be considered either food safety or hunger lobby concerns. Yet because of the recent controversy surrounding government's role in influencing what people eat, nutrition issues are here treated separately.

Prior to the early 1970s, the basic nutritionist message was simply to eat a variety of the four basic food groups: fruits and vegetables; meat, poultry, fish, and eggs; milk and milk products; and bread and potatoes. It is interesting and important to note that there was no mention of fats and oils, sugar, or alcohol. In addition, little was said about how much to eat. The nutrition message began to change with the formation of the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs in 1970. In 1977, this committee issued its controversial dietary goals followed by its more sedate dietary guidelines in early 1980. While the importance of eating a variety of foods continued to be recognized, the goals and guidelines radically changed the basic nutrition message to one of moderation and avoiding certain foods. Those foods to avoid included fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Sugar and salt were to be consumed in moderation. It was also recommended that if you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. (The dietary goals and guidelines are discussed in Knutson et al. 1983, 312-16.)

As a result of these recommendations, the nutrition educators added a fifth food group to the previous four. Logically, it recommended servings of fats, sweets, and alcohol (Davis et al. 1980). Farmers--particularly cattlemen and dairymen--were enraged. Woodshed sessions were held with land grant university nutrition educators who dared to teach the new message in major agricultural states.

In addition to CNI and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (which publishes the monthly magazine Nutrition Action), the major nutrition advocate is the Society of Nutrition Education. This society has as its members most of the leading nutrition educators and dieticians. One of its major programs has been to implement the dietary goals and guidelines into its nutrition education message. Despite the objections of the farm bloc, this has been, to a very large extent, accomplished.

The hunger lobby, as is obvious from its name, is concerned with issues of hunger, malnutrition, and the adequacy of the food supply (domestic and foreign). Prior to the 1960s, food programs were largely surplus disposal programs. This was, arguably, even true of the school lunch program. Hunger was viewed as being the responsibility of churches and communities--as some would suggest the Reagan administration views it today.

The hunger lobby is a complexity of consumer interests (CNI and CFA), union interests, religious interests, minority group (NAACP) and poverty interests, as well as urban and state government interests. Three groups warrant special

mention as those having a pronounced impact on food programs.

Bread for the World is a nondenominational Christian public interest movement concerned with problems of hunger in America and abroad. In addition to advocating expanded food programs, it has been a strong proponent of domestic and international grain reserves. It has also expressed concern over the use of food aid programs such as P.L. 480 as a diplomatic tool.

World Watch Institute has persistently raised food supply and resource issues to a level of national visibility.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) plays the interesting role of ensuring that legal remedies are available to legitimate recipients of domestic hunger programs. Individuals illegally denied food stamps, after FRAC intervention, have been issued stamps retroactively under court order.

It is critically important to recognize that the hunger lobby is not the only group attempting to influence food assistance programs. Food marketing firms mold the nature of food programs to their economic welfare. For example, food processors and retailers generally prefer food stamp programs, which utilize regular commercial channels, over commodity distribution programs. For example, Kraft has lobbied heavily against the special cheese distribution program because it displaces its commercial sales of Kraft cheese.

Farmers and ranchers likewise have a unique interest in food programs. Cattlemen, dairymen, and fresh vegetable producers particularly benefit from expanded demand for their products (Boehm and Nelson 1978). In addition, the food program debate has historically been treated as part of the farm bill debate. Farm state congressmen frequently argue that they would have great difficulty getting a favorable farm bill enacted into law, were it not for the food stamp provisions. Food stamps attract urban votes for the farm bill.

The environment lobby. While soil conservation programs have historically been an important aspect of farm policies, contemporary environmental concerns have raised the ire of many farmers and farm organizations. Examples of such contemporary concerns include the use of chemicals to control agricultural pests, the contribution of soil erosion to water pollution, the exporting of soil in the form of crops produced under intensive farming practices, the rights of farm labor, and the rights of animals.

There seems little doubt that the following four groups

or their successors will have a major impact on policy in this increasingly controversial area.

The Sierra Club is the oldest, largest and best endowed defender of our natural resources. Its members are frequently politically powerful in their own right. It has been an advocate with regard to virtually all of the environmental and resource use issues.

The Environmental Defense Fund serves as the scientific backstop for the environmental movement. It has been a strong advocate of tighter EPA regulations.

Friends of the Earth is an environmental lobby having both domestic and international interests. It has been a particularly ardent advocate of restricting U.S. corporations from selling internationally agricultural chemicals that have been banned in the United States.

The National Association of Farm Worker Organizations (NAFO) is a federated lobbyist for over fifty migrant and seasonal farm worker organizations. NAFO has been active on a broad range of farm worker concerns including living conditions, exposure to pesticides, access to food assistance programs, unemployment compensation and unionization.

The Public Interest and Farm Policy Development

It can be seen from this lengthy, albeit superficial, description of public interest lobbies that these groups represent a wide range of concerns. A number of contemporary issues more directly related to farm policy and program development arise out of discussion of this type. The remainder of this paper is devoted to these issues.

Is there a public interest in farm policy? Many, if not most, farmers and ranchers would deny the need for public interest involvement in farm policy decisions. Farmers, they assert, do not have a representative in the Department of Health and Human Services; why then should there be consumer representation in the USDA. The answer lies in a number of realities:

- (a) Food is a necessity of life. An adequate supply of food is, therefore, a necessity. As long as it remains so, consumers will be involved. So will farmers.
- (b) Food expenditures represent 17.3 percent of the consumer price index. While farmers, economists, and politicians can argue over the existence of

a cheap food policy, an interest in the price of food will continue.

- (c) Farm prices do affect retail food prices. Farmers receive only 32 percent of the consumer's food dollar. That translates into only 5.5 percent of the consumer price index. While labor costs exceed the farmers' share, farm prices are more unstable. Therefore, at particular times over the past decade, farm prices have been the major factor increasing or reducing food prices. The increases, of course, get most of the attention.
- (d) Farm programs do affect food prices. For most major commodities since the early 1970s this effect has been negative--that is, commodity prices have gone down. This results from the change in program emphasis to direct payments in the late 1960s. Target prices do increase and stabilize producer receipts. Producers respond by increasing production, which in turn depresses market prices.

There are times when farm programs have had a pronounced upward food price impact, the PIK program being an obvious case in point. While it is difficult to separate the PIK effect from the weather effect, there should be no doubt that if you take 38 percent of the farmland out of production, prices are affected--even if the poorest land is taken out of production.

Other farm programs also affect food prices. The milk price support program as well as dairy, fruit, vegetable and nut marketing orders are cases in point. These programs, therefore, have carried the brunt of public criticism of farm programs. Recent studies have identified what are increasingly referred to as the "dirty eleven" fruit, vegetable and nut orders (Heifner et al. 1981).

Yet, even the impact of these programs on prices can be exaggerated! The hops marketing order, for example, has come under extensive criticism. However, the hops in beer costs less than the cap on the bottle. An Ohio study found that a 10 percent increase in price supports or loan rates would result in only a 1.5 percent food price increase (Henderson 1980, 25). A weakness of the Henderson study is that it assumed a direct dollar-for-dollar pass through of the farm price increase.

In reality, retail price increases tend to occur as a multiple of farm price increases. This is partly because farm price increases tend to occur in shocks of substantial magnitude related to changes in weather or government policy. A farm price increase, because it is frequently one of the more significant cost items, provides justification for larger price increases.

Can the Secretary of Agriculture Make Decisions in the Public Interest?

The Department of Agriculture was established by President Lincoln as "the people's department." The implication of this designation was that decisions made by the secretary of agriculture were to have a special public interest emphasis to them. Is that, in fact, the way USDA has operated?

There are arguments on both sides of this issue. It can be asserted, with justification, that the long-term beneficiary of many, if not most, USDA programs is the consumer. For example, while cost-reducing agricultural research and extension programs benefit the first adopters of the new technology generated by agricultural research, technological change is rapidly "forced" on all farmers and its benefits are passed on to consumers in the form of lower food and fiber prices (Cochrane 1958). Likewise, without effective production controls, price and income enhancement programs have the distinct tendency to generate surplus production and eventually force farm prices back down. That is happening currently in the case of milk. While for nearly four years, the milk price support has been maintained at a high level relative either to other commodities or to cost of production, it is now being forced back down by the sheer economic forces of oversupply. Equally important, it should not be forgotten that since the explosion in the cost of food programs in the mid-1960s, the food and nutrition components of USDA have been as important a component of the budget as the farm programs.

On the other side of the coin, however, it is well recognized that historically the Department of Agriculture has been controlled by the agricultural establishment (Paarlberg 1975, 1980). This establishment is composed of the secretary of agriculture, the agriculture committees of the Congress and the farm organizations. Paarlberg has argued that the agricultural establishment lost control of farm policy sometime in the early 1970s. There has been, without question, a shift in the balance of decision power on food issues away from purely agricultural considerations toward general economic and trade considerations. And during the Carter-Bergland

years there was a distinct effort to move USDA in the direction of becoming a "department of food." That move was strongly resisted in rural areas. It undoubtedly cost President Carter many farm votes in the 1980 election.

Today, USDA is as staunchly agricultural as it can be in a democratic society where only 2.4 percent of the people are farmers. PIK would likely not have been possible if USDA were a people's department as opposed to a farmers' department. We would not have the current dairy surplus mess if milk policy decisions had been made in the public interest over the past two decades. We would not have spent \$19 billion on farm program in FY 1983 if the agricultural establishment had lost control.

Is the reversion toward establishment control good? Answering this question obviously involves value judgments. Recognizing this, let me voice my opinion that the reversion to strong establishment control is not in the long-run interest of farmers. In fact, ultimately I have the concern that it will destroy USDA's status as a cabinet agency of the executive branch of the government. This concern is based on the persistent tendency for functions having a public interest emphasis to be transferred out of USDA to other government agencies. Examples include the creation of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission as a regulatory agency independent of USDA's Commodity Exchange Authority, the gradual but persistent shifting of food safety and nutrition functions to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the increasing Environmental Protection Agency regulation of agriculture at the expense of USDA regulations. Additional proposals for transfer of regulatory authority include the transfer of all food programs to HHS, transferring meat and poultry inspection to HHS, and transferring Capper-Volstead undue price enhancement enforcement responsibilities to the Federal Trade Commission.

The common characteristic of the transfers that have taken place as well as those that are proposed is that these functions conflict with what is perceived to be the short-run interests of the agricultural establishment. They also raise questions of whether the secretary of agriculture can administer its programs in the public interest. These questions are not limited to government programs that might be viewed as occupying the "fringes" of agriculture. They are increasingly being raised regarding mainstream farm programs. The inability or unwillingness of the USDA to control abuses in the PIK and related acreage reduction programs provides an excellent example. Another example lies in the persistent Office of Management and Budget intervention in marketing order decisions as the public interest representative. An even broader illustration lies in the increasing tendency of

farm policy decisions to become presidential decisions, reflecting the concern that the secretary of agriculture cannot make these decisions in consideration of the national public interest.

Do Public Interest Groups Have Much Effect on Farm Policy?

The continuing heavy bias of USDA toward the short-run interests of farmers raises questions regarding the influence of public interest groups on farm policy. The reality that public interest groups are able to raise their concerns about agricultural issues to a level of visibility indicates a degree of influence. The nature and degree of that influence varies from issue to issue. Without question, public interest groups such as CNI and the hunger lobby have had a major impact on USDA food programs. Cutbacks in these programs would undoubtedly have been more severe during the Reagan administration were it not for the active public interest lobby. EPA and HHS would not be nearly as involved in agricultural issues were it not for the activity of the environmental and food safety lobbyists. Probably, the Ford wheat embargo would not have been imposed without the food price-motivated pressure by labor unions.

Even in mainstream farm program decisions, there has been a public interest impact. Secretary Butz marshaled active support from consumer interests to stave off milk lobby pressures to increase price supports. Consumer interests teamed up with food manufacturers that use large quantities of sugar (Sugar Users Group) to defeat a sugar price support bill in 1978. The 1981 farm bill nearly went down to defeat (it passed by two votes in the House) in part because of consumer dissatisfaction with such crucial provisions as the dairy program.

As a general rule, public interest input into farm policy development tends to flow largely through the Congress--specifically the House of Representatives. Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to increased public interest influence on farm policy is the reapportionment requirements. The result has been a decided shift in the balance of urban and suburban influence in the House of Representatives. Today only about 80 out of 435 congressmen have a distinctly rural constituency. As a result, in order to get a farm bill through the Congress, there cannot be extensive urban opposition. This reality provides the opportunity for substantial public interest impact on farm bills and related legislation.

How Do Public Interest Groups Organize to Affect Policy?

Earlier discussion of the various components of the public interest lobby did not develop any concept of how these groups organize to affect policy. They naturally attempt to identify their lobbying activities with the reality that every voter is a consumer and a taxpayer. Like farmers and farm organizations, public interest groups are highly variable in the degree of emphasis on political financial support. Labor unions and environmental groups are well endowed financially and operate political action committees (PACs) that rival those of the dairymen and the agribusiness sector.

Public interest groups utilize the same combinations of horse trading, logrolling, compromise and coalition building as any other lobbies. Their effectiveness is enhanced by an organizational format referred to as networking. The networking concept involves joint organizational membership and involvement. For example, virtually all consumer groups are active members of the Consumer Federation of America. Federation activities are, in turn, tied back into CNI, the Public Voice for Food and Agriculture, the Center for Science and the Public Interest, FRAC, and Congress Watch. As a result of these interlocks, several groups are out front lobbying but they largely represent a single constituency.

Farm organizations are considerably more fragmented in their approach. While the farm bloc or farm coalition is frequently discussed as a unified farm organization force, its recent history is one of disunity and unwillingness to compromise or even join ranks. The farm bloc could increase its effectiveness by adopting networking strategies. To do this, the farm bloc would need to be formalized into a tightly knit joint membership structure. Commodity groups such as the National Wheat Growers Association, the Corn Producers Association, the National Cotton Council and the National Cattlemen's Association would be overt members of the general farm organizations (American Farm Bureau Federation, National Farmers Union, American Agriculture Movement, National Farmers Organization) and vice versa. Differences among these groups would be hammered out within network meetings. A unified voice could then be conveyed to Washington. The point is that the current fragmented farm organization structure is the most basic weakness of the agricultural establishment. This weakness in effect gives public interest advocates, having a relatively small membership, substantial political clout on particular farm and food policy issues.

Can Public Interest Advocates Represent Farmers?

The notion of a marriage between farmers and consumer interests is not new. One of the most notable examples is from Minnesota where Hubert Humphrey forged the Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL) out of what might appear to be conflicting interests. The untimely death of Missouri Congressman Jerry Litton ended a campaign to develop a joint farmer-consumer farm policy coalition. The National Farmers Union has been actively involved in several public interest advocacy groups.

The Texas agricultural establishment is experiencing an unusual experiment in public interest advocacy representation. In 1980, Jim Hightower was elected the Texas Commissioner of Agriculture. For agriculturists, Hightower became a household word when, as the leader of Ralph Nader's Agriculture Accountability Project, he authored the book entitled Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times. This book posited a conspiracy among agribusiness firms, large farmers, the land grant universities and the USDA to generate technologies and government policies that operate to the detriment of family farmers and the general public.

Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times received extensive criticism from the agricultural establishment. However, its populist underpinnings have not been a political liability for Jim Hightower. While Commissioner Hightower is from time to time the subject of agricultural criticism, such as during the recent EDB controversy, he enjoys substantial rural, as well as urban, support. In fact, he has sufficient support within the Democratic Party to have earned the position of chairman of the Agriculture Subcommittee in the Democratic National Committee. That is, until the Democrats choose a presidential candidate, Commissioner Hightower is in charge of the national Democratic agriculture campaign. Some believe that Commissioner Hightower is angling for the job of the next Democratic Secretary of Agriculture. At a minimum, he would appear to be in a very good position to be offered a high level USDA appointment in a Democratic administration.

Hightower could be an exceptional case. However, with the increasing agricultural dichotomy between large farmers (who control most of the production) and smaller farmers (who make up most of the population), a public interest advocate with the "right stuff" can represent the majority of the farmers. He might, therefore, be viewed as a champion of the middle size and smaller family farm interests.

Problems may be encountered in gaining the support of the larger farmer agricultural leadership.

How Will the Public Interest Affect the 1985 Farm Bill?

The impact of the public interest on the outcome of the 1985 farm bill deliberations is perhaps the hardest question to answer because so many variables are involved. Among the most important are the economic conditions in agriculture at the time of the debate, the degree of unity within the agricultural establishment, and the outcome of the election.

An abundant crop in 1985 would make the level and nature of price support, as well as the degree of production restraint, the central policy issues. In the 1981 farm bill, the perception of a limited amount of money to spend on farm programs turned out to be a major wedge of disunity. As a result of this perception, there was disagreement over how to divide the limited pie among commodity interests, in addition to the normal philosophical disagreements within the farm bloc. This same situation could easily develop in 1985. If it does, public interest advocates will have more than the normal amount of influence because the farm bloc would be easier to divide and conquer.

Over the past several years, public interest groups have exhibited a strong interest in particular commodities. Dairy, tobacco, and sugar are cases in point, with the possibility that peanuts could be drawn in with tobacco because of the traditional program similarities. Public interest coalition possibilities are strong in each of these commodities. In this regard, with agribusiness unhappiness over the PIK program, a consumer-agribusiness coalition against production control programs is also a strong possibility.

The outcome of the election could also have a major impact on the influence of the public interest element in the 1985 farm bill debate. Control of the White House as well as control of the Senate is up for grabs in the 1984 election. The Democratic Party has the interesting characteristic of being a haven for both public interest advocates and for farmers who support production controls. It is difficult to predict their policy position on specific issues under these circumstances. One common thread of support running through the Democratic farm program philosophy involves the need for commodity reserves.

The reelection of President Reagan also leaves policy uncertainties--albeit fewer. Who would have expected the highest farm program expenditures and the largest production

control program in history by the Reagan administration? A second term for President Reagan will almost certainly yield severe budget pressures for both farm and food programs. A more trade-oriented philosophy is likely in a second term without the accountability imposed by reelection politics. This could drive the hunger and nutrition components of the public interest lobby into a politically potent coalition with farmers and organized labor. Such a combination has the potential for drawing a presidential veto of the first 1985 farm bill passed by the Congress. Such an occurrence would really muddy the agricultural and food program waters. Its likely outcome would be a one-year extension of the 1981 farm bill. Farm policy would then be debated once again in 1986, yielding a 2½-year debate on the appropriate direction of farm policy.

Conclusions

The influence of the public interest lobby has increased materially since the 1960s. However, it is easy to overestimate the public interest influence on farm programs. Clearly, the public interest influence is materially greater on food and environmental issues than on farm issues. In fact, it is impossible to identify any public interest organizations that have a comprehensive position on farm program issues. Rather public interest lobbyists have a distinct tendency to attack specific farm policy issues such as milk or sugar programs.

While most farmers would probably just as soon see the public interest lobby disappear, it will not. Rather, its influence will continue to grow. As it grows, the farm bloc will feel increasing pressure to close its ranks, unify, and find an improved basis for compromise. The failure of the farm bloc to close ranks will make the public interest lobby appear to be a formidable force.

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