Farm Crisis in Oklahoma, Part 1

*By Richard Lowitt**

For two decades during the 1970s and 1980s farmers throughout the bread basket of America, cattlemen, grain producers, and the communities that served them experienced severe economic distress that played havoc with their lives. While farmers protested, organized (some even went on strike), and went deeper into debt, Washington, D.C., seemed indifferent to their plight. Its policies threw the agricultural sector off balance and created a cost-price crisis that devastated all but the largest producers.

What caused this crisis? To start, one can note that military operations in Vietnam were conducted with no tax increases to cover its staggering cost. As a result inflation began to mount. In 1971 President Richard M. Nixon briefly instituted wage and price controls to dampen rising prices. At the same time the U. S. Department of Agriculture

(USDA) and its allies sought a general loosening of crop and price controls with increased emphasis on sales abroad, thereby abandoning the supply-management approach of the preceding Democratic administrations. Opponents feared the increasingly efficient U.S. farming methods without adequate planning and controls would produce huge surpluses, drive prices down, deplete farm profits, and create serious problems for the rural economy. Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture during the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations, exemplified the new approach urging farmers to get big or get out and to plant commodity crops from fencerow to fencerow.

This two-part article examines the unfolding of this approach as it affected primarily Oklahoma cattlemen and grain producers. By the 1970s the state was among the nation's top producers of winter wheat, with cattle joining wheat as major commodities. While the trend in agriculture had been toward a reduction in the number of farms, larger acreages per farm plus an increase in their values was evident both in the nation as a whole and in Oklahoma. In the 1970s more than 80 percent of Oklahoma's land was used for agricultural production.[1]

On June 18, 1974, Carl Albert sought permission to address the Committee on Agriculture, an unusual request by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Albert asserted that the cattle industry was in "a financial squeeze," experiencing "the worst decline in twenty years, while at the same time the worst peace-time inflation in history causes production costs to skyrocket." What disturbed Albert was the fact that the administration gave every evidence that it understood neither the depth nor the meaning of the problem. The same could be said for every administration from Nixon on into that of Ronald Reagan.[2]

Ranchers were faced with declining cattle prices, while feed and other costs were continually rising. Everything was out of balance. Many in the business blamed beef imports, which had a direct impact on the domestic price. Albert cited Nixon's decision in 1972 to lift the quotas imposed by the Meat Import Act of 1964. And in the face of decreasing demand and increasing production, several nations instituted import quotas on foreign beef. Some, Albert claimed, were prohibiting beef imports altogether, leaving the United States with the only open market that was "quickly becoming the dumping ground for world beef producers." Owing to rising imports, increased domestic production, and decreased demand, Albert said "the beef market has become glutted."[3]

Adding to the cattleman's woes was the soaring increase in the cost of production. Along with cow-calf-producing costs, the price of fuel, fertilizer, baling wire, and feed increased dramatically and continued

Carl Albert (20699.73.14.3.8, State Museum Collection, OHS Research Division).

to soar. Nixon's placing a price ceiling on beef in 1973 served only to disrupt the cattle industry in that, as Albert explained, many farmers and ranchers held cattle "off the feed lots and out of the slaughter houses," hoping to turn a profit when the price freeze was lifted.[4]

A final factor disrupting the agricultural economy, Albert explained, was "the cash situation of our producers and feeders." Through normal banking channels, cattlemen secured "mortgages on their cattle, their land and everything else they own." With lack of available cash the whole credit system could grind to a halt as the numbers of defaulting borrowers mounted. As their cash supply was depleted, their debts accumulated, and many sought to refinance their loans. Having neither cash nor equity, increasing numbers of debtors faced bankruptcy or liquidation. Moreover, Albert insisted, cattlemen could not be divorced from the rest of the economy. Small town businessmen, local bankers, and agriculture-related industries all were impacted as the domino effect extended out into the broader economy.[5]

Earlier Governor David Hall sent an urgent letter to President Nixon indicating that Oklahoma, along with other cattle feeding states, faced a "pending disaster of crisis proportions." After briefly delineating the situation, Hall asked the president to designate cattle-feeding sectors of the nation as "severe economic impact areas" and thereby qualify cattlemen for long-term, low-interest loans available to businessmen and citizens when a natural disaster occurred. Nothing emanated from the concerns of both the governor and the Speaker.[6]

For more than a decade it was evident to members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation that no administration had any intention of coping with the mounting concerns of cattlemen and farmers. For as long as they served in the U.S. Senate, both Dewey Bartlett and Henry Bellmon called for the reinstitution of import quotas on beef. Beginning in 1974 and for as long as he remained in the Senate, Bartlett introduced legislation to curb meat imports. He noted, "there are many beef producers who are losing $100 or more for each animal that is now sent to market."[7]

Tumbling prices for beef on the hoof were playing havoc with the cattle industry. "It just doesn't make sense," remarked Johnny Hafner, Jefferson County extension director. "Everything else is going up. Feed, seed, fertilizer, interest, you name it. Prices for other things have doubled and tripled but cattlemen are watching a year of work go down the drain." Paul Hammonds of the Waurika Livestock Market asserted that some cattlemen were "losing thousands of dollars a day." Sooner or later, he said, "the smaller fellows are going to quit and the bigger boys are going to cut back." In Jefferson County and throughout Oklahoma feed lots were seriously impacted. Some closed down. Then the stocker-feeder operations and the practice of grazing heifers for a year prior to sending them to feed lots lost their markets, with the cattlemen working a year for nothing.[8]

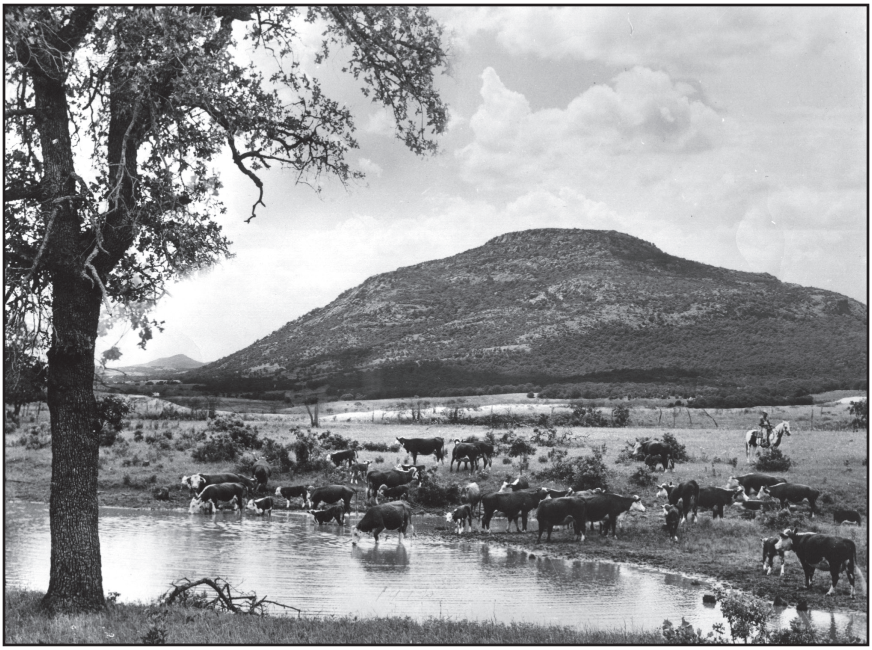
People pointed to the 1973 freeze on beef prices ordered by President Nixon. With the industry thus singled out, cattlemen started holding back until the freeze was over, creating a shortage followed by skyrock-

Dewey F. Bartlett in 1967 during his tenure as governor of Oklahoma. Bartlett also served as U.S. Senator from Oklahoma (11780, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS Research Division).

eting prices. By late summer 1973 consumer demand for beef waned and the backlog of cattle held off the market began to go to slaughter causing a glut of over-finished beef and tumbling cattle prices. While supplies leveled out, farm prices, led by beef, continued to fall. The Oklahoma Crop and Livestock Reporting Service said that the livestock index plunged fifty points in May 1974, 16 percent below the previous year. At the same time the index of prices paid by farmers and ranchers was up 16 percent over the previous year. While most observers expected the larger operators to handle the situation, consumers could look forward to stringier beef and higher prices. But for smaller communities such as those in Jefferson County that used to produce fifty thousand calves a year, selling them at forty cents a pound at an average of five hundred pounds per head could result in disastrous income loss.[9]

Cattle in tall grass on the T. J. Stockton ranch near Nowata, Oklahoma. Photograph by Louis E. Reid, October 24, 1948 (20778.AG.SCS.Okla.9779, box 1, OHS Research Division).

Because of continual high losses and the drain of cattlemen's equity, the banks and financial institutions on which cattlemen depended were finding it difficult, if not impossible, to make new loans and to extend existing loans. With both the Congress and the administration interfering with the market, farmers and ranchers were unable to gain meaningful relief.[10]



Cattle watering on the Jay Clark spread with Mount Scott in the background, August 1951 (14247, Ranch and Range Photographs, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS Research Division).

In June 1974 about two hundred ranchers signed petitions protesting the quality of beef imports, which Representative Clem McSpadden claimed could amount to 12 percent of total U.S. consumption. He suggested curbing beef imports, exporting beef to Canada, and lowering grading standards to reduce time on feed without reducing beef quality. But as with most such proposals, few, if any, gained approval while the cattleman's dilemma continued: animals going for less than forty cents a pound and stockmen considering holding their product off the market as the cost of the goods they purchased continued to increase.[11]

To dramatize their plight some 160 Oklahoma ranchers made plans to join in a mass beef slaughter if President Gerald Ford took no cognizance of their problems. By October 1974 some ranchers were losing their homes and selling off their herds. Francis Stagna, the group's organizer, said he had sold eight-hundred-pound yearlings for only eighteen cents per pound. "You can't stay in business spending a year or more to raise a calf you're selling at that price," he declared. While not all Oklahoma cattlemen agreed with Stagna's notion of slaughtering cattle, many, along with cattlemen in other states, did.[12]

Out in the panhandle Duty Rowe along with his neighbors, determining the feed lot business was no longer profitable, closed down the Frontier Feed Lot in Guymon. "Eighteen months ago," Rowe exclaimed, "we had a 49 percent equity in our cattle. Today that margin is gone and we even are experiencing a negative margin." Rowe claimed this situation was "eating up our reserves" and that their only recourse was "to mortgage the land to satisfy our bankers." At his prime Rowe was handling anywhere from three thousand to five thousand head of cattle. In October 1974 he had seven hundred.[13]

With the value of cattle declining roughly by two-thirds of their cost in a single year, small operators were being wiped out. Dumping cheap beef on the U.S. market only exacerbated the situation, as did remarks by Earl Butz, the secretary of agriculture, to the effect that there was going to be plenty of beef and that it was going to be cheap. But consumers in Oklahoma saw little, if any, decline in prices at their local meat counter. Inflation forced stores to keep beef prices steady, despite a drop in suppliers' prices.[14]

Unfortunately, in 1974 cattlemen were not the only agricultural sector experiencing declining commodity prices and rising costs. "There is no way," warned Henry Bellmon, that U.S. producers "could provide an abundance of food for consumers while being forced to pay higher prices for their supplies and then selling their products at artificially low domestic prices." Farmers, like any other consumer group, were affected by rising prices for food, clothing, and other day-to-day needs. They also were hit by rising prices for items they secured from other farmers, as well as costs of new combines and coveralls. As a producer-consumer the farmers were balanced between profits and losses when things were on an even keel. When they became unbalanced, they could go over the brink. And by late 1974 such was the case, when the price of everything a farmer needed, from tractors to tires for older tractors, to labor costs for motor tuneups, and to diesel fuel and other petroleum products, increased dramatically. Virtually no industrial product needed by farmers failed to rise in cost.[15]

Speaking for the grain producers, who were the largest group of Oklahoma farmers, Billy Ray Gowdy, president of the State Board of Agriculture, called President Ford's decision to block the sale of thirty-four million bushels of wheat to the Soviet Union "very poor public relations as far as world trade is concerned" because foreign officials worried whether the United States would be a dependable commodity supplier. Gowdy and fellow wheat farmers were concerned, confused, and scared because only about one-third of the nation's wheat harvest was used domestically. Grain growers complained their marketing sys-

Terrace planting with sweet clover, oats, wheat, and winter oats near Mayes, OK. Photo by Jim Slack, May 19, 1937 (20788.AG.SCS.Okla.5781, box 1, Edd Roberts Collection, OHS Research Division).

tem had been taken away, while Sixth District Congressman Glenn English proclaimed what was already becoming self-evident, namely, the absence of strong vocal representation for agricultural concerns in Congress. Overnight, as a result of Ford's action the state wheat trade markedly declined. An agronomist associated with Oklahoma State University argued that the president "sold out the breadbasket of the nation to soothe the consumers." Previously the federal government had encouraged farmers to increase production for export. It now turned around and placed limits on exports. While only a temporary measure until the administration presented a modified system of export controls, Ford's action caused confusion to reign among Oklahoma wheat growers.[16]

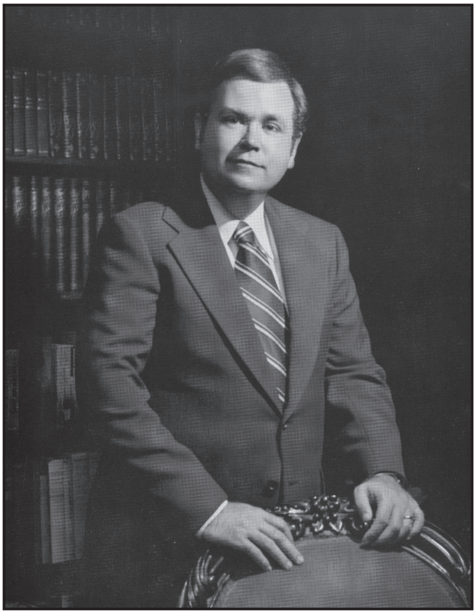
Depressed prices now were the lot of the two major sectors of Oklahoma agriculture. As Oklahoma wheat farmers in 1975 looked forward to a bumper crop, concern mounted as prices dropped from about $3.60 per bushel in April to about $3.11 per bushel a month later. Critics insisted that the goal of the administration, personified in Secretary Butz, was to tilt agricultural policy so large corporations could make the marketing decisions, and Oklahoma, let alone other mid-America cattlemen and farmers, many of whom were already struggling for survival, would eventually be eliminated as a significant part of U.S. agriculture.[17]

And by 1975 producers of food already were being forced out of business. On into the next decade administrations manifested little concern about the depression in U.S. agriculture while concerned members of Congress were unable to secure effective legislation restoring a balance to an economic climate where, as one constituent informed Carl Albert, "you can't raise twenty dollar a hundred calves and pay one hundred and eighty dollars a ton for feed, five thousand dollars for a pickup, and twenty-five dollars a roll for barbed wire where you can find it. A new tractor will cost eight to fourteen thousand dollars and about everything else used on the ranch has gone up while cattle prices have gone down since the government has stuck its nose into the business" in its effort to placate large corporations and urban consumers. This cost-price freeze created a "state of near panic" among Oklahoma cattlemen, several of whom, along with some state legislators, went to Washington, D.C., seeking legislation.[18]

Indicative was a 1975 article titled "Price Perspective on Agriculture" that cited farm prices rising 72 percent in the previous two decades, almost 25 percent more than industrial prices. While farm prices moved in two directions, farmers' costs went only one way–up. This development was spelled out in considerable detail in the letters pouring into Washington, D.C., from distressed farmers and ranchers.[19]

Carl Albert received one such letter from a friend who recently traveled throughout southeastern Oklahoma with a farm editor. What he heard and saw "was not only shocking but sickening," namely, thousands of cattle malnourished or starving, in either case dying because the owners had neither means nor credit to feed them properly. What was clear to Albert was that without the federal government responding promptly, many rural Oklahomans faced the loss of their entire capital investment and productive capacity. What particularly grated many rural residents was the failure of Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan to approve omnibus bills or to seriously raise the loan and target price on farm commodities because such actions would be too inflationary.[20]

With agriculture the largest single industry in the state's economy, accounting for more than one-fourth of the jobs and personal incomes, there was ample cause for concern. Governor David Boren worried

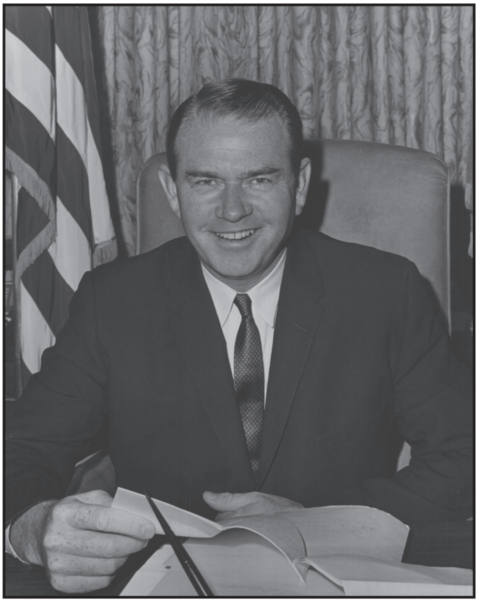


David L. Boren, governor of Oklahoma and later U.S. Senator from the state, taken by Oklahoma Today *magazine (13435.B, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS Research Division).*

about the impact of a projected record wheat crop depressing prices and causing producers' gross income to drop. This situation, combined with low cattle prices, would cost the state millions of dollars in lost tax revenue. Boren, like members of the congressional delegation, called for government action but to no avail.[21]

But it was Carl Albert who understood most clearly the dramatic reversal in agricultural policies "away from efforts aimed at curtailing excess production to avoid surpluses," such as the New Deal approach, "toward the new goal of maximizing the nation's agricultural production to avoid shortages." The farm programs launched during the New Deal contained "built-in incentives not to produce." The new programs sought to achieve "greater production from the nation's agricultural acreage." Besides coping with the devastating cost-price squeeze and mounting farm debt, Congress also would have to grapple with ways and means of securing enhanced soil conservation in "light of the nation's present and future requirements."[22]

Meanwhile, a new dimension was added when a National Farm Coalition citing the precipitous decline in farm prices called on the federal government to provide meaningful price protection. The coalition's appeal was all to no avail, as were the penetrating remarks of Carl Albert endorsing the 1975 farm bill. Opponents called it inflationary and outrageous as did the president when he vetoed the measure.[23]



Oklahoma Governor and U.S. Senator Henry Bellmon (19413.75.178.86, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS Research Division).

The farm bill called for an increase in target prices, a concept introduced in 1973 wherein the government would pay the farmer the difference when the sale price was less than the target price. With the cost-price squeeze farmers were experiencing, higher price supports were a high priority for farm state legislators and their constituents. By 1975 Oklahoma farmers were no longer seeking comforts but were struggling for their survival. Despite being deluged by rural legislators the president vetoed the 1975 Emergency Farm Bill largely on the premise it would encourage inflationary spending and add to the deficit. Thus by the end of the Ford administration the pattern was set for almost another decade. Agricultural distress could not prompt meaningful legislative redress. The most lasting criticism of this pattern came from Senator Henry Bellmon, the only member of the delegation and one of very few members of Congress who rode a tractor and farmed for a living. Calling Ford's veto "indefensible," he noted, "This is the same President who last October ordered a virtual embargo on wheat exports which caused a sharp break in wheat prices." For the remainder of his tenure Bellmon remained the sharpest critic of the nation's farm policies.[24]

The veto and the pattern it encouraged left the farmer without price protection at a time when high costs were already going higher and the federal government was calling for an all-out effort in production. Bankruptcy loomed for many Oklahoma producers. A ray of hope for wheat producers occurred when it appeared that the Soviet Union would be purchasing more than 2 million metric tons of hard winter wheat, the kind grown in Oklahoma. With a wheat crop in 1975 expected to yield a record 59.5 million tons, up 10.7 million from 1974's record harvest, the sale to the Soviet Union, while good news for Oklahoma wheat farmers, was no more than a ray of hope.[25]

The wheat sale prompted members of the longshoremen's union to refuse to load U.S. wheat for export. Urban newspapers speculated that the sale might cause higher prices for consumers. And Earl Butz admitted that the longshoremen's action came shortly after he and the administration decided upon a moratorium on grain sales. Throughout the ensuing decade Oklahoma producers concluded that political considerations were a primary factor affecting their access to free export markets. They were being tested and frustrated by these developments, first believing they would have free access to world markets and then finding a year later that export wheat sales were curbed especially after the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) endorsed the activities of the longshoremen. Many argued that consumer-oriented groups were depriving rural producers of their share of profit. Since the bulk of Oklahoma's grain needed to find a market with less productive nations, there was mounting agreement that the federal government catered to urban groups and interests.[26]

The focus on the distressed grain market diverted attention away from the collapsed cattle feeder industry. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Bellmon, President Ford, who was in Oklahoma City for a series of campaign appearances, met with leaders of the cattle industry. The United States, Bellmon observed, was the only country with borders open for unrestricted import of foreign beef. If the United States demanded reciprocity from foreign nations in exchange for trade concessions, then, Bellmon said, U.S. beef producers could compete in expanded foreign markets, thereby insuring an adequate beef supply and a healthier industry. At the time of this meeting with the president wholesale prices of beef were so low that cattlemen were selling their breeding herds. In short, by the last year of the Nixon-Ford administration cattlemen and farmers felt betrayed by their government. Maximum production was not insured with protection as Secretary Butz had promised. And the beef industry, the largest segment of U.S. agriculture, already had sustained over a two year period unprecedented losses and faced at the end of 1975 many more months of uncertain fluctuations.[27]

With wheat it was a similar story. The Treasury Department, State Department, and Department of Agriculture all engaged in efforts that in effect helped depress prices. With a record high wheat harvest in 1975 and an equally abundant one in 1976, increased sales to the Soviet Union and other foreign buyers, plus expanded Food for Peace commitments, would be necessary to sustain sagging domestic wheat prices and reduce wide price fluctuations in the U.S. grain markets. To help producers avoid ceasing operations, rural bank loans rose at a rapid rate. Banks in Oklahoma increased their agricultural lending at a 13.2 percent annual rate over the previous decade, the highest of any state within the Tenth Federal Reserve District.[28]

It was becoming an all too familiar pattern. Oklahoma farmers and ranchers asked for help and waited only to endure continuing delays and denials. Various groups then began to offer proposals, as did members of Congress. Thousands of individual farmers in the 1970s and 1980s appeared to lobby in Washington, D.C. Many no longer trusted top officials. "People out here," wrote a wheat farmer to Carl Albert, "are so distrusting of our government it is shameful." By far the angriest critic was Senator Bellmon, who bitterly denounced administration farm measures proclaimed by President Ford on down to the secretary of agriculture and on to the "instant agricultural experts" in the White House, Commerce Department, and State Department. Their policies and actions ignored or gave short shrift to the desperate situation of farmers and cattlemen in Oklahoma. The unfolding system of boom and bust was showing signs of wrecking major segments of the agricultural economy.[29]

Federal meddling with the export sales of Oklahoma wheat and beef penalized farm families and placed a serious burden on small rural banks. The government, for example, set a wheat loan rate as well as a target price almost always too low to encourage farmers to produce a crop. While many farmers had difficulty maintaining their operations with the loan rates and target prices imposed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, administration officials claimed that if they raised loan rates and called for higher target prices, they would place themselves in the untenable position of encouraging wheat production for government support rather than profit. While the beef embargo was soon lifted, beef imports continued to easily enter the U.S. market, keeping prices depressed both in grain and livestock. Bellmon claimed that "wheat prices are a dollar a bushel below cost, [and] cattle probably $50 a head below cost of production." Production costs kept increasing while farm income tended to stay level.[30]

In 1976 Governor Boren noted that agricultural advisors informed him that inflation was "eroding farm income at an alarming rate" because farmers, unlike most businessmen, had no means of passing higher costs on to consumers. As governor there was little he could do to meliorate the situation except to call for officials in Washington, D.C., to act.[31]

The Carter Administration, like its predecessor, did little to alleviate the concerns of Oklahoma producers. The president and his secretary of agriculture appeared unwilling to cope with low beef prices and high grain costs. It made little sense, for example, to increase beef imports when there was greater domestic beef production and to allow less imported beef when there was declining domestic production. The reverse, the sensible approach, would take more than a decade to achieve. For the administration to call for an economic stabilization program to curb inflation and to keep the nation in a favorable balance of payment position would be of little assistance to farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma who were increasingly dependent on foreign markets for the sale of their products.[32]

To reduce the supply of wheat (the 1976 wheat crop was one of the largest ever produced in Oklahoma), farmers grazed out or baled their seeded wheat acres. They soon learned that only acres harvested for grain could qualify for target payments. Reducing the abundance of wheat penalized producers who complained bitterly that the restriction only added to their woes. By 1977 farm numbers in the state, according to the *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, were down one thousand from the average number for the 1973-1975 period. Farm sales and public auctions of equipment by farmers were becoming increasingly common. This situation was only exacerbated by the fact that in 1977 farmers were holding a surplus of more than one billion bushels of wheat with a good part of the excess due to government embargoes. Moreover, prospects for selling carryover wheat were not good because the world's wheat producing countries, notably Canada and the Soviet Union, also produced bumper crops.[33]

For Oklahoma cattlemen the situation was equally bleak. Most were seeking to cut production. Indeed herds in 1977 had been reduced by about ten million head. As cattlemen struggled to get supply in reasonable balance with demand, the State Department through voluntary agreements with meat exporters agreed to import 1,281,900,000 pounds of beef in 1977, the equivalent of 6 to 7 percent of domestic consumption. Imports in this year either equaled or exceeded all the dairy cows, beef cattle, and heifers weighing more than 500 pounds in the state. This situation plus adverse weather conditions, low cattle prices, high feed costs, and short hay stocks in some localities led to se-

Milk cattle in Hennessey, Oklahoma, 1932 (20778.AG.AR.32.1449, box 1, Edd Roberts Collection, OHS Research Division).

vere culling and in some instances the complete liquidation of herds.[34]

In 1977 Carter vetoed a major farm bill that took into account the plight of distressed Oklahoma producers. Bumper crops continued to depress prices as production costs continued to increase. A local farm official summed up rural grievances when he wrote his congressman, "farmers in general are thoroughly disgusted because they have seen for many years improper supply management on farm products, gross pay acre reductions . . . unintelligible ASC (agricultural stabilization and conservation) formulas, mock target prices, high interest rates on so-called emergency livestock loans, uncontrolled acreages and surpluses, wheat embargoes, and beef imports." Moreover, he asserted, "policy makers gave little consideration to the current cost of production, including land, machinery, and general agricultural inputs." While it was relatively easy for wheat growers and cattlemen to agree on the problems they faced, the solution was not that obvious when it came to favoring a strict acreage control plan or agreeing on how high loan rates or target prices should be set. There were many different suggestions emanating from farmers and ranchers as well as the USDA and Congress.[35]

However, by the spring of 1977 in one sector of the rural economy there was an encouraging sign. The American National Cattlemen's Association reported that "cow slaughter" was continuing at a rate that was putting the basic herd into better balance with the demand for beef. Since 1975 more than twenty-two million cows had been slaughtered. The president of the association announced that "the cow herd has now returned to the trend line." While the situation was improving, the issue of beef imports continued to plague cattlemen, and the association's president said the cow herd would have to further decline before the total industry could expect favorable returns. Many cattlemen were still losing anywhere from twenty dollars to one hundred dollars every time they sold an animal and had stretched their borrowing, as had wheat farmers, to the limit as they attempted to continue operating.[36]

Furthermore, concern was mounting in that fewer sons would follow their fathers into farming. And farm women, equally concerned, wrote about family members seeking work off the farm and the difficulties they faced in maintaining the family farm and enjoying life in a rural community. No one expected to get rich, but they did hope "to see ends meet once in a while" and resented the large operator who plowed under "a better crop of wheat than we harvested just so he could collect the government payment." One couple wrote, "Every day for the last two months there are ten to twelve public auctions in our paper of farmers selling out or taking bankruptcy because they haven't been able to continue under present day prices." Comparable letters increasingly written by farm women were beginning to pour into congressional offices.[37]

A growing sense of desperation was evident in these letters. Farmers were beginning to feel that their representatives had let them down. All were concerned that they were losing money on every bushel of wheat they sold. Some were willing to cut acreage, hoping in this way to get supply and demand in line to gain a fair return on labor and investment. Most recognized that government policies caused their problems and were increasingly frustrated that no resolution was evident.[38]

Disillusioned though they might be, groups of Oklahoma farmers still flocked to Washington, D.C., to lobby for higher wheat prices. One group carried sixty-one thousand letters from wheat growers. Another group included 120 farm wives all seeking a greater level of support for wheat. At a meeting in Tonkawa farmers filled a pickup truck with about sixty thousand letters to send to Washington, D.C. Most asked for higher loan limits and target prices. Later a group of ninety women made a three-day trip to the nation's capital. Governor Boren also went to Washington, D.C., to inform President Carter that Oklahoma's thirty-two hundred farmers were in dire financial straits. It was all to no avail. At the same time a survey of bankers in the Great Plains region by the Economic Research Services revealed Oklahoma to be "in the most serious plight" of all the states surveyed. It indicated that

THEN AND NOW--HOW FARM PRICES AND COSTS DIFFER FROM WHEN 1973 FARM ACT WAS ADOPTED

As the U.S. House moves into floor consideration of the 1977 farm bill, here are some interesting comparisions of how economic conditions have changed for farmers since the last time a major farm bill has been adopted--in August, 1973. Although there are some exceptions (soybeans, milk, and oats), most commodities are well below the levels now compared with prices being received by farmers in August or September, 1973. Here are some comparisons:

COMMODITY	THEN	NOW
WHEAT, bu.	$ 4.62	$ 2.00
CORN, bu.	2.15	2.09
BARLEY, bu.	2.16	1.96
GRAIN SORGHUM, cwt.	3.87	2.96
RICE, cwt.	11.60	7.23
FLAXSEED, bu.	7.29	5.68
HOGS, cwt.	56.50	41.90
BEEF CATTLE, cwt.	51.70	34.10
WOOL, lb.	.808	.737
EGGS, doz.	.642	.468

But, while prices of most farm commodities are low in dollar terms and particularly so in terms of purchasing power, the cost of things farmers buy or use to produce have as much as doubled in the four-year interim. Prices paid by farmers for commodities and services, interest, taxes, and wage rates are up by one-third since August, 1973, but the costs of many individual items are up considerably more than the average. The interest payable per acre on farm real estate debt has more than doubled. Farm wage rates have advanced by an average of 43%. Fertilizer prices paid by farmers have risen about 50%. Farm machinery prices are up almost 80% on the average. Farm and motor supplies have about doubled in price. Here are some item-by-item comparisons:

ITEM	THEN	NOW
PICK-UP TRUCK, 3/4 ton	$ 3,300.00	$ 5,650.00
ANHYDROUS AMMONIA, ton	92.50	188.00
GRAIN DRILL, 24-tube	2,860.00	5,210.00
DISK TILLER, 12-ft.	1,570.00	2,520.00
WHEEL TRACTOR, 90-99 h.p.	10,800.00	18,800.00
TANDEM DISK HARROW, 16-ft.	2,050.00	4,520.00
COMBINE, large, self-prop.	22,200.00	42,300.00
CORN PLANTER, 4-row	1,830.00	4,450.00
GASOLINE, farm del., gal.	.328	.572
DIESEL FUEL, gal.	.209	.451
BALER TWINE, 40-lb. bale	8.96	15.20

Chart prepared by the National Farmers Union, 1977 (courtesy of the author).

thirty-two hundred farmers would not be able to refinance their loans through any lending agency.[39] A chart prepared by the National Farmers Union in 1977 dramatically illustrated the cost-price squeeze that was devastating farmers in Oklahoma and throughout the breadbasket of the nation.[40]

Following the veto of the 1975 farm bill the crisis for wheat producers deteriorated further. By July 1977 the price of wheat had fallen to less than half of the 1974 level, while farmers' direct costs continued to rise sharply. The Department of Agriculture estimated that thirteen thousand farmers in Oklahoma were unable to repay their loans. Glenn English noted that "this agricultural disaster is threatening many small businesses in rural areas . . . ." Accompanying depressed wheat prices was a huge 1.1 billion bushel surplus.[41]

What puzzled and aggravated farmers was the federal government bestowing billions of dollars in aid to foreign countries while denying aid to embattled farmers. The situation was "especially tragic" for "the new generation of young men and women who purchased their land" at prevailing high prices. Carter's veto of the 1977 farm bill on grounds that it was too costly and could trigger further inflation did not go down easily with producers in Oklahoma. They wanted improved target prices for wheat, and their congressmen called for a loan rate that would immediately rise to 90 percent parity, while hundreds of Oklahoma wheat producers and farm wives visited Washington, D.C., to lend their support. The fact that the secretary of agriculture did not call for a large enough acreage set-aside to help get the wheat surplus under control further disillusioned farmers.[42]

On a more limited scale Bellmon sought to use set-aside wheat acreage for cattle grazing. His initial task was to convince farm organizations to change their stance and then to pressure the administration to allow grazing on wheat acreage taken out of production under its recently announced wheat set-aside program. Bellmon argued that southern wheat producers and the large purchasers of stocker cattle, heifers, and calves raised to round out or replenish depleted herds would be the chief users of these lands. Bellmon argued forcefully for his proposal, but it was several years before it was accepted.[43]

Cattle in tall grass on T. J. Stockton ranch near Nowata. Photo by Louis E. Reid, October 24, 1948 (20778.AG.SCS.Okla.9779, box 1, OHS Research Division).

The same could be said for his colleague Dewey Bartlett, who sought to correlate world beef supplies with domestic supplies. He recognized that peaks in beef available for importation coincided with peaks in domestic supply, a situation further amplified by the fact that the United States was the lone large market in foreign beef. Thus, as the domestic market showed an increase in domestic production, the same message was transmitted to foreign producers. Oklahoma cattlemen were caught in a vise preventing them from climbing out of their depressed state. Through a series of measures Bartlett sought to achieve a stabilizing influence for domestic beef producers by measures that would approach an inversion of the total beef production, an inversion that was achieved during Reagan's second term. Meanwhile, peak imports continued at times of herd liquidations, further exacerbating falling prices and making it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for producers to cover their costs while other countries involved in the international meat trade imposed quotas, tariffs, and other barriers that helped keep U.S. beef from gaining access to their markets. What Bartlett and his fellow cattlemen set as their goal was for imports to be increased when domestic supplies were short and decreased when domestic production was excessive.[44]

By year's end in 1977 the USDA acknowledged that "some thousand Great Plains farmers" were unable to pay their loans and "about 60 thousand" would be forced to renegotiate their loans or sell some of their assets. At the time wheat producers were losing anywhere "from $1.00 to $1.50 per bushel" and were distressed upon learning that the People's Republic of China, suffering a serious crop failure, was purchasing possibly five hundred million bushels of wheat, the bulk of which was not being purchased in the United States. Farmers slowly but surely were losing confidence in their government, a sentiment expressed in a letter to Fourth District Congressman Tom Steed: "The people of my community, farmers and businessmen alike, are fed up with the indifferent bureaucratic treatment of our number one industry."[45]

Late in 1977 a new organization named American Agriculture quickly gained supporters throughout Oklahoma. As farmers became more desperate, they became more belligerent. Younger, college-educated farmers took the lead in demanding governmental action. Some called for a strike to help realize American Agriculture's primary goal of 100 percent parity. It further advocated farmers having more authority in the Department of Agriculture. These were bold and aggressive proposals, yet labor unions and legislators already enjoyed comparable benefits. Not having the numbers or the money to compete in a consumer-oriented Congress, farmers did have power as food producers to use it as a weapon for their own protection. This was the message of American Agriculture that resonated throughout rural Oklahoma.[46]

To many it seemed that every time a bill came out of Washington, D.C., it created more problems for the farmer. Such was the case with the 1977 farm bill with a set-aside provision requiring a cover crop without compensation, thereby limiting or prohibiting growing wheat or grazing cattle on the land. And as in all farm bills, producers in Oklahoma insisted the target prices did not approach their cost of production.[47]

Unexpected support came when Governor Boren asked Oklahomans to write letters to national leaders urging action to correct "the desperate financial condition" of farmers. The governor endorsed a farm strike "as a demonstration to the American people that American agriculture is in deep trouble." He commended the leadership of American Agriculture because the movement thus far remained voluntary, nonviolent, and responsible. With only 4 percent of the population actively engaged in farming, Boren asserted "dramatic demonstrations" were needed to arouse "fellow citizens and Washington leaders." He further noted that "every banker, small business person, teacher and factory worker will feel the pinch, because when farmers can't earn, they can't buy as customers." Already thirty-two hundred farmers faced the loss of their farms because they could no longer refinance loans, while another 40 percent had to refinance loans. And, Boren added, "if things don't change soon thousands will be forced to put the product of their life's work on the auction block." In endorsing the farm strike he observed that national income of farms in 1973 was $73 billion; in 1977 it was only $17 billion, while investments and operating costs had skyrocketed since the 1950s.[48]

Boren's speech before more than one thousand farmers in Enid highlighted a gigantic strike rally where more than seven hundred farm vehicles, chiefly large, expensive tractors, jammed the streets before merchants opened their stores. While most farmers in attendance were from grain-rich northcentral Oklahoma, some came from as far away as Minnesota and Virginia. Meanwhile, 130 miles south of Enid striking farmers paraded through Apache in Caddo County, while officials in other counties pledged "sympathy and support." In Guymon officials of the Panhandle Livestock Commission Company announced they would shut down operations for ten days as a gesture of sympathy with striking cattle operators and growers.[49]

Assuredly, the strike with its demand for 100 percent parity helped bring the plight of farmers to public awareness, but there was no assurance of widespread understanding of the problem. Steed noted that only forty-eight members of Congress could be defeated by the farm vote; the rest were from city and suburban areas. Moreover, most consumers, unaware of the farmers' situation, never called their congressmen to support legislation to resolve the cost-price squeeze or to increase price supports and alleviate the crisis.[50]

Members of American Agriculture recognized that if something was not done to change the trend in Oklahoma agriculture, it would soon be in corporate hands. The organization's leaders presented farmers with detailed knowledge of their plight and the significant economic impact of agriculture on the U.S. economy. When fully organized, it promised, if necessary, to "paralyze this whole country" by plowing up wheat and otherwise halting production. Organizers in communities throughout the state stressed the five-point program of their demands that revolved around providing 100 percent parity for all domestic agricultural products and halving all agricultural imports until 100 percent of the parity price was achieved. All contracts for food reserves also should call for 100 percent parity. In addition, American Agriculture wanted farmers to devise and approve policies affecting agriculture. To express these views the movement launched a statewide letter-writing campaign asking farmers, merchants, and citizens to bombard officials in Washington, D.C., expressing their concerns.[51]

Soon members of the Oklahoma delegation again found themselves deluged with letters from constituents calling attention to their plight and the program of American Agriculture. Constituents wanted equality in return for providing food for the American people and others throughout the world. The letters came from residents young and old, men and women, city dwellers and folks in small towns, and rural areas plus others in all walks of life. Some delineated their personal histories, others simply called for 100 percent parity, some were formally typed, others were in semiliterate scrawls. All desired greater equality for agriculture, summed up in the call for 100 percent parity.[52]

And there was no end in sight. For example, the market price for cattle went from about forty-four dollars per hundredweight in 1974 to thirty-nine dollars per hundredweight in 1977. This was not an extreme price drop, but the effect of inflation made it more difficult for cattlemen to stay in business. More dire was the drop of 1 percent in land values in Midwestern states during a three month period in 1977. Without inflating land prices many farmers would be unable to secure credit to cover future borrowing. In Washington, D.C., one hundred Oklahoma farmers, young, middle-aged, and old, spent hours with Bellmon in his Senate office, relating their stories of coping with high operating costs, low market prices, and unfair exporting practices. Most wore work jackets and caps with the American Agriculture logo and faces drawn with worry. They were among thousands of farm families who journeyed to Washington, D.C., to demand parity. Most rallied in subfreezing weather on the Capitol steps for two hours to hear speeches. Aside from genuine concern, Bellmon could provide little assurance of prompt remedial action. However, at the Oklahoma State Capitol American Agriculture got encouragement from legislators, the governor's office, and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. A spokesman for the state beer industry, a major purchaser of grain, endorsed the movement. "What American Agriculture has done," said Governor Boren, "is to allow farmers to rally around a cause." Realizing that cause was the problem.[53]

Endnotes

[*]Richard Lowitt is a retired professor history at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. Dr. Lowitt currently resides in Concord, Massachusetts.

[1] *Statistical Abstract of Oklahoma: 1975* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Center For Economic and Management Research, 1975), Section 3.00 Agriculture.

[2] Carl Albert Remarks to Committee on Agriculture, June 18, 1974, box 233, folder 23, Carl Albert Collection, Legislative Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as CAC, LS, CACCA).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] David Hall to Richard M. Nixon, April 16, 1974, box 63, folder 2, Dewey Bartlett Collections, Clippings Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as DBC, CS, CACCA); see also David Hall to Dewey Bartlett, May 16, 1974, ibid.

[7] "Bellmon, Bartlett Urge Reduced Beef Imports," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), May 24, 1974.

[8] *Waurika (OK) News-Democrat*, June 13, 1974, box 41, folder 19, Dewey Bartlett Collections, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as DBC, CACCA).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Bartlett: Draft Statement Before Agriculture Committee . . . , June 17, 1974, box 41, folder 19, DBC, CACCA; "Cattlemen Face Financial Ruin, Senators Told," *Tulsa World*, June 18, 1974, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA. The purchase of one hundred million dollars worth of beef and pork by the government would have almost no effect on the sagging cattle industry said a spokesman for the Oklahoma cattlemen; see story in *Tulsa World* by Mike Flanagan on June 19, 1974, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA.

[11] "Ranchers' Petition Urges Import Curb," *Tulsa World,* June 24, 1974, box 64, file 8, DBC, CS, CACCA; stories regarding livestock are found in the *Tulsa Tribune*, June 18 and June 25, 1974, and in the *Tulsa World*, June 18, 1974, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA.

[12] "State Ranchers Plan Support of Slaughter," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 6, 1974, box 1, folder 9, Carl Albert Collections, Clipping Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited, CAC, CS, CACCA); see also "Ranchers to Eye Slaughter, " *Sunday Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), October 13, 1974,

box 1, folder 9, ibid.

[13] "Biting Bullet . . . No Easier for State Cattleman," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 10, 1974, box 1, folder 9, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[14] "Ranchers to Eye Slaughter," *Sunday Oklahoman*, October 13, 1974, box 1, folder 9, CAC, CS, CACCA; "State Beef Consumers Not Getting Benefit of Cattlemen's Falling Prices," *Sunday Oklahoman*, October 13, 1974, ibid.

[15] "Bellmon Calls Grain Sale Curbs Hasty, Ill Conceived," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 6, 1974, box 1, folder 14, CAC, CS, CACCA; unidentified clipping, August 11, 1974, DBC, CS, CACCA.

[16] "Gowdy Slaps Wheat Action," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 8, 1974, box 1, folder 14, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[17] For the plight of one Oklahoma rancher, see the letter by Alice Hicks to the editor of the *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman* on p. 16 of the January 1975 issue. For Earl Butz's views, see "Crusader Butz," a 1975 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, n.d., box 7, folder 30, DBC, CS, CACCA.

[18] Lloyd Jones to Carl Albert, January 17, 1975, box 192, folder 9, CAC, LS, CACCA; Albert to Jones, January 21, 1975, box 192, folder 9, CAC, LS, CACCA. Jones's letter is typical of hordes of letters that poured into the offices of the Oklahoma congressional delegation; for an example of legislation that provided minimal relief, see the discussion of the Emergency Livestock Credit Act of 1974 in a memo from Tom Thornbrugh to Bartlett, January 30, 1975, box 42, folder 27, DBC, CACCA; for Bartlett's legislative efforts to aid cattlemen, see his newsletter "An OKIE in Washington," n.d., February 1975, box 63, folder 2, DBC, CS, CACCA; also see *Sunday Oklahoman*, February 9, 1975, box 63, folder 2, DBC, CS, CACCA; see also Bartlett's press release on February 6, 1975, box 7, folder 30, DBC, CACCA; see also Carl Albert to Tom Foley, January 27, 1975, box 192, folder 15, CAC, CACCA, for Albert's observation of a "state of near panic"; for the delegation going to Washington, see Allan Cromley to Oklahoma Publishing Company (OPUBCO), January 29, 1975, box 9, folder 1, Allan Cromley Collection, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as ACC, CACCA).

[19] Glenn English to Dear Colleague, January 30, 1975, box 71, folder 5, Tom Steed Collections, Legislative Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as TSC, LS, CACCA); see also, "Are Wheat Prices Going the Way Cattle Prices Did?" leaflet, box 192, folder 9, CAC, LS, CACCA; "Price Perspective for Agriculture," *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, February 1975, 38.

[20] Jesse Berryhill to Carl Albert, February 11, 1975, box 192, folder 9, CAC, LS, CACCA; unidentified clippings, February 11, 1975, and February 12, 1975, in box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA; Carl Albert to Carl Russell Richman, box 192, folder 23, CAC, LS, CACCA.

[21] For David Boren's views, see "Wheat Sales Push Due?" *Tulsa Tribune*, February 19, 1975, box 1, folder 14, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[22] Carl Albert to Arvil Mauldin, February 26, 1975, box 192, folder 23, CAC, LS, CACCA.

[23] Statement of the National Farm Coalition, March 10, 1975, box 7, folder 18, TSC, LS, CACCA; John W. Scott to Carl Albert, March 14, 1975, box 192, folder 15, CAC, LS, CACCA; Carl Albert Statement in Support of Agriculture Bill, March 11, 1975, box 71, folder 5, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[24] Dewey Bartlett to Gerald Ford, April 23, 1975, box 7, folder 30, DBC, CACCA. Bartlett urged the president to reconsider his views. For more on Oklahoma legislators' efforts to block the veto, see *Daily Oklahoman*, April 24, 1975, box 1, folder 8, CAC, CS, CACCA. The U.S. House of Representatives sustained the veto by a vote of 245 to 182, which was 40 short of the two-thirds necessary to override the veto. See also *Daily Okla-*

homan, May 3, 1975, box 1, folder 8, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[25] "Soviets Buying Wheat," *Tulsa World*, July 17, 1975, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA; Carl Albert to P. E. Winfrey, July 22, 1975, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA.

[26] Glenn English, *Plain English by Glenn English*, newsletter, week of September 22, 1975, box 9, folder 1, ACC, CACCA; William Woodward to Carl Albert, August 7, 1975, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA; AFL-CIO Executive Council Statement on Russian Grain Purchases: July 31, 1975, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA; Bartlett press releases of August 13, 1975 and September 7, 1975, box 7, folder 30, DBC, CACCA; telegram, Hinton, OK, Kiwanis Club to Carl Albert, September 5, 1975, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA; Bill Pope to Carl Albert, September 11, 1975, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA; Carl Albert to Paul Kohler, September 24, 1975, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA; see also the unsigned letter to Tom Steed on September 17, 1975, box 71, folder 10, TSC, LS, CACCA. All foregoing citations pertain to the Soviet grain sales.

[27] "Cattlemen Voice Complaints," *Oklahoma Journal* (Oklahoma City), October 23, 1975, box 1, folder 9, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[28] Mary Hamblin, "Bank Lending to Agriculture: An Overview,"*Economic Review* 60, no. 9: 13.

[29] O. A. Meyer to Carl Albert, January 20, 1976, box 192, folder 32, CAC, LS, CACCA; *Daily Oklahoman*, January 25, 1976, story by Allan Cromley, box 1, folder 8, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[30] Glenn English press release, September 12, 1976, box 9, folder 2, ACC, CACCA; Ed King to Dewey Bartlett, September 23, 1976, box 42, folder 27, DBC, CACCA; *Holdenville (OK) Daily News*, September 28, 1976, story by Harry Culver, box 1, folder 9, CAC, CS, CACCA; "Rep. English Joins Wheat Loan Move," *Oklahoma Journal*, October 7, 1976, box 1, folder 14, CAC, CS, CACCA.

[31] David L. Boren, statement, October 21, 1976, box 135, folder 24, Carl Albert Collections, Department Series, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as CAC, DS, CACCA).

[32] David Nemechek to Tom Steed, January 8, 1977, box 83, folder 5, TSC, CACCA; Karen Sandini to Tom Steed, February 18, 1977, ibid.; *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, February 1977, 3; English, *Plain English by Glenn English*, March 2, 1977, box 9, folder 3, ACC, CACCA. Senator Henry Bellmon introduced a bill to pay wheat farmers to take part of their acreage out of production and use it for grazing.

[33] Ibid.

[34] "Small Packer Worried Over Meat Imports," *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, March 1977, 22.

[35] Don Johnson to Tom Steed, March 30, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LC, CACCA. Johnson was president of the Washita County Farmers Union. See also Ernest Shiner, "Sooner Summary," *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, April 1977, 8.

[36] See story in *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, April 1977, 40-41, 50.

[37] Jenny Legg to Tom Steed, April 18, 1977, box 83, folder 3, TSC, LS, CACCA; Adrian Vincent to Tom Steed, n.d., 1977; Howard and Genevieve Nicholson to Tom Steed, April 22, 1977, ibid.; W. S. Merch to Tom Steed, April 24, 1977, ibid. Similar letters can be found in other Oklahoma congressional collections at the Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

[38] For example, see Mike Cordes to Tom Steed, April 25, 1977, box 83, folder 3, TSC, LS, CACCA; Clark N. Garfield to all Government Officials, n.d., ibid.; Roy and Donna Roth to Dear Sir, n.d., ibid.; Frank Kucera to Dear Sir, April 26, 1977, ibid.; Mary Ida Morrison to Tom Steed, May 1, 1977, TSC, LS, CACCA. See *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, May 1977, 7, for wheat stories.

[39] *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, June 1977, 6, 24; *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, July 1977, 3; letter from Mrs. Sallie Fisher to Dear Editor, *Daily Oklahoman*, July 8, 1977,

box 83, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA; Allan Cromley to the *Daily Oklahoman*, July 8, 1977, box 4, folder 16; David Boren to Dear President Carter, July 8, 1977, box 4, folder 16, ACC, CACCA.

[40] A copy of the chart prepared by the National Farmers Union is in box 83, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[41] Glenn English to Tom Steed, July 8 and July 15, 1977, box 83, folder 3, TSC, LS, CACCA; Joe Neal Hampton to Tom Steed July 11, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACCA; and Charley and Vala Duffy to Tom Steed, July 14, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[42] "English Anti-Embargo Amendment Included in Final Version of Farm Bill," press release, n.d., box 9, folder 3, ACC, CACCA; "Consumer Federation of America," press release, July 20, 1977, box 9, folder 3, ACC, CACCA; Glenn English to Tom Steed, July 25, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACCA; "Sooner Summary," *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, August 1977, 8.

[43] Henry Bellmon News, September 1, 1977, box 4, folder 1, ACC, CACCA; Vivian Vahlberg to OPUBCO, September 1, 1977, box 4, folder 1, ACC, CACCA. Shortly thereafter, Dewey Bartlett joined Bellmon in criticizing the set-aside program. Bartlett news release, October 14, 1977, box 46, folder 2, DBC, CACCA.

[44] Dewey Bartlett statement, September 20, 1977, box 44, folder 29, DBC, CACCA; see also the comprehensive statement of the National Cattlemen's Association of September 20, 1977, box 83, folder 4, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[45] Henry Bellmon to Bob Bergland, October 31,1977, box 4, folder 1, Henry Bellmon Collections, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as HBC, CACCA); Tom Steed to Monty Morrow, October 31, 1977, box 83, folder 5, TSC, LS, CACCA; Monty Morrow to Tom Steed, October 24, 1977, box 83, folder 5, TSC, LS, CACCA. For information on the failure to sell wheat to China, see Vivian Vahlberg to OPUBCO, November 4, 1977, box 4, folder 1, ACC, CACCA.

[46] Monty Morrow to Tom Steed, October 24, 1977, box 83, folder 5, TSC, LS, CACCA.

[47] Steed: Attention Nov. 1, 1977, unsigned letter, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACCA; Lois Scott to Tom Steed, November 3, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACA; J. A. Carrick to Chief, Cooperative Staff, PSL Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) November 3, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACCA. Carrick critiqued the 1977 farm bill. See also Washington Bureau to OPUBCO, November 4, 1977, box 4, folder 1, ACC, CACCA. The set-aside provision regarding grazing was later modified.

[48] *Daily Oklahoman*, December 23 and 24, 1977, stories by Jim Young and Ed Kelley, box 4, folder 16, ACC, CACCA.

[49] *Daily Oklahoman*, December 24, 1977, story by Ed Kelley, box 4, folder 16, ACC, CACCA.

[50] Tom Steed to Mrs. D. H. Shumaker, December 30, 1977, box 83, folder 9, TSC, LS, CACCA; see also *National Journal*, December 17, 1977, 1974. There were tractors in the national capital and thirty state capitals seeking to bring attention to the farm crisis.

[51] John D. Scott to Henry Bellmon, January 2, 1978, box 96, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA; Jack Robinson to Honorable Senator Dewey Bartlett, January 4, 1978, box 10, folder 27, DBC, CACCA; Dewey Bartlett to Ted Wagoner, January 10, 1978, box 10, folder 27, DBC, CACCA. The *Muskogee (OK) Phoenix* on January 6, 1978, published a story by Steve Ray Liman covering a meeting where an organizer discussed American Agriculture at the Trade Winds Motor Inn, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CACCA.

[52] In January 1978 Tom Steed received several hundred letters. Many of these can be found scattered throughout box 90, folders 1 through 8, TSC, CACCA. Dewey Bartlett received similar letters but not as many. See box 10, folder 27, DBC, CACCA.

[53] *Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*, January 4, 1978, 4; *Daily Oklahoman*, January 20, 1978, box 90, folder 1, TSC, LS, CACCA; and *Daily Oklahoman*, March 17, 1978, story by

Ed Montgomery, box 63, folder 17, DBC, CS, CACCA. The story in the *Oklahoma Times*, January 22, 1978, claimed about six hundred Oklahoma farmers were in Washington, D.C., box 63, folder 7, DBC, CS, CACCA. Later at a governors' meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota, David Boren observed that if OPEC could control oil prices, why could not the United States and the other top wheat-producing countries that sold 85 percent of the wheat in the world do more to improve wheat and grain prices. See Summary, January 31, 1978, box 4, folder 16, ACC, CACCA.