

Senator Robert Morgan
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PRESERVING OUR RURAL HERITAGE

It is always refreshing to talk to young people who are planning to make farming a career. As you know, this country was founded on the fact that our agricultural products provided an opportunity to own land and build a home. The frontier spread from Jamestown to the west coast as settlers took advantage of the richness of the land.

This frontier disappeared at the end of the 19th century, and that fact became ever more significant as farming lost its dominant position to commerce, finance, and manufacturing. Now, the rural areas of the country are politically dwarfed by large urban areas. More important, it is increasingly difficult for young people to find land and the finances to begin farming. Indeed, the family farm is threatened by the forces of inflation and mechanization. Have we witnessed the passing of a great American Dream?

Despite what seem like overwhelming odds, I do not want to talk to you about the discouragements that face the

coming generation of farmers. Rather, I would like to talk to you about revitalizing farming. I still think that the dream of a self-sufficient life on a farm is a worthwhile goal.

In this respect, there has been an increased interest in the structure of American agriculture. Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland has held meetings across the land to investigate what is on the minds of farmers and what they see as the most pressing issues that face them. This data and these ideas will be used when the Congress considers the Agriculture bill of 1981. Though this might seem distant to you, I think that when this bill develops there will be an increased awareness of what problems farmers are facing in our economy. The time has come to ask some tough questions about the growth of large farming operations that threaten the family farm.

The family farm has been not only an ideal described by such founding fathers as Thomas Jefferson, it has also been a way of life for many Americans. The values taught on the farm are useful. Earling morning and evening chores, hard work, family ties, and a closeness to the land and to nature are certainly values that are constructive. Many people still believe that there is no better environment in which to rear children.

The family farm, however, is threatened by forces that farmers have little control over. It is difficult enough to earn a living that is threatened by the whims of nature. If the rains don't come, if they fall too hard, if the fickle weather does not smile upon the farmer's labor, then all the hard work is in vain. But the weather is only one wild card that farmers must deal with. Today, there is a price-cost squeeze that threatens profits. Letters pour into my office from farmers who complain justly that their costs for fertilizer, fuel, money, implements, and labor have risen much quicker than the price that they get for their products. The recent grain embargo also hurt many farmers, for the price of soybeans and grains has fallen drastically, despite governmental efforts to soften the blow.

North Carolina tobacco farmers have an even tougher problem, for every year now there is an attack on the tobacco support program.

As any of you who have ever housed a crop of tobacco know, it takes a lot of hard work. Yes, I know this is not the country to come to and talk about tobacco, but did you know that Union County in 1974 had twice as many tobacco farms as in 1969? The Agricultural census showed that in 1969 Union County had no tobacco farms but in 1974 there was one that raised 700 pounds of tobacco.

But I do want you to know that the tobacco support program is crucial to our state. This modest program has almost paid for itself over the years. Since 1933, when the program started, over \$5 billion has been loaned to growers and only 1 percent of that written off as loss. That is a good program.

Union County has been wise to diversify its crops. In the old days southern agriculture was cotton and tobacco. In your county the Agricultural Census shows that there are many crops grown, and livestock and poultry play a large part in the economy of the county. I met not long ago with some of the farmers from this county, and they made it clear to me that this is going to be a very difficult year for them. Since then I have been even more attentive to farm problems.

North Carolina is still largely an agricultural state. As your Senator I intend to do all that I can to preserve our rural heritage. Most of all, I want to preserve one of our most cherished institutions--the choice to farm for a living. You young people are our hope for the future, and I believe in you.