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Address on Agriculture, Fremont, Nebraska, September 28, 1935

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Geo Deen  
Dan Strawn  
Geo Rogers  
Mr Thayer

Gov. Cochran  
Sen. Rusk  
Sen. Norris

I am glad to be in Nebraska again. It is almost exactly three years ago that I visited farms in this State and saw farmers threshing thirty cent wheat and shelling twenty cent corn. Much has happened during the three years that followed. Then, the prices of farm products were falling lower and even lower as markets vanished and surpluses accumulated; farm buildings and equipment were deteriorating month by month; soil fertility was being sapped as farmers struggled to raise enough bushels to meet their debts and taxes. Country schools were closing and, most disheartening of all, thousands of farmers were losing their homes by foreclosure. This was true not only in this part of the great West, but in practically every State of the Union - north, east, south and west.

The man made depression was, as we know, followed in many parts of the country by the most severe drought in our recorded history.

I am taking the opportunity of stopping here in Fremont to deliver to you a message of thanks. Through you I deliver that same message to farmers and farm families throughout the Nation.

We all know the heroic story of the pioneers. We know the hardships and the troubles they suffered. If ever we need demonstration that the pioneering spirit that originally settled this country still lives, unshaken and undiminished, the farmers of America have proved it in the years through which we have just passed. I well realize the suffering and the desolation. I know the faith and hope, the patience and courage you have shown. For this I applaud you; for this I extend the thanks of the Nation to the farmers of the Nation.

Three years ago I did not promise the millenium for agriculture. But I did promise that I should attempt to meet that intolerable situation in every way that human effort and ingenuity made possible. I said that I should do my best, and that if my efforts proved unsuccessful, I should tell the country frankly and try something else. But that, ~~thank God,~~ was not necessary.

I was not meeting a theory, I was meeting a condition, ~~and~~ Foremost among the efforts of my Administration when we came into office were practical means to improve the situation on the farms of this country. I recognized <sup>in March 1933</sup> that efforts to improve agriculture should of necessity be twofold. We should attempt, first, to lift the immediate burdens by raising farm prices and by lightening the burden of debt. Second, I pledged myself

to long-term efforts extending beyond these immediate emergency measures to stabilize American agriculture by long-term planning.

Even before I went to the White House I put into practice a theory which older and more cynical persons told me was impossible. Up to that time the farmers of America had been unable to choose by any substantial majority between three or four plans aimed at restoring farm purchasing power and farm prosperity. People in Washington told me that you could never get farmers as a whole to agree to anything. Nevertheless, at the famous conferences, representative of every section of the country, and of every farm organization, held in Washington in the spring of 1933, a very large majority of the farm leaders agreed on what you and I now know as the Agricultural Adjustment Plan. This plan has been in operation for only two years and a half. You know its general results. You know that there have been many imperfections in it and that we still have much to learn in providing better administration for it, in amending it from time to time, and in fitting it in to world conditions, which each year show tremendous changes.

The plan itself was, as you know, based on the cooperative efforts of the farmers themselves and on the broad economic theory that the industrial part of the population of the Nation could not prosper and return people

to work unless the agricultural part of the Nation were in a position to purchase the output of the industrial part. It was based on knowledge of the fact that for the farmers of the Nation the long, downhill road to depression began not in 1929 but in 1920; that from that date on through the so-called boom days of the nineteen twenties the debts of the farms and farmers mounted while their assets and earnings slid down hill.

Coming back to you after three years, I experience the extreme pleasure of recognizing that the cooperative efforts in which the farmers themselves, the Congress and my Administration have engaged, have borne good fruit.

The problem of the early days of <sup>the</sup> Administration was not only to raise crop values from starvation levels, but also to save farm families from actual loss of their homes and their chattels.

The burden of agricultural debt, it is true, has not been eliminated, but it has been decisively and definitely lightened. Loans have been made through the Farm Credit Administration to nearly half a million farmers since May, 1933. These loans amount to more than \$1,800,000,000. Eighty-seven per cent of this great sum was used to refinance existing farm indebtedness. The annual interest saving of farmers whose debts have been refinanced is about one-quarter of the interest previously paid. Over 850,000 farmers are

making savings this year on interest alone of more than \$55,000,000. The interest rate which farmers have to pay on the farm mortgage debts refinanced by the Farm Credit Administration is the lowest <sup>rate</sup> in history.

My second effort in the immediate improvement of the farmer's position was to get him not only ~~an absolutely~~, but <sup>an absolute</sup> ~~a relatively~~, better return for his products. In approaching this problem we moved on two fronts; first, to free our monetary system of bondage to a sufficient extent to permit money to serve the people rather than to force people to serve money. I deliberately chose to disregard those who said that before a balance could be produced in our economic life, almost universal bankruptcy would be necessary through deflation. I held, as I now hold, that the appropriate measures to take were rather to improve prices, particularly in farm commodities, to such an extent that the things the farmer had to sell would enable him to buy the things that he needed to support life and to afford him a fair degree of security. From the summer of 1929 to the time when I took office in 1933, the prices of farm products, that is, the things that the farmer had to sell, had declined by 62%, while the prices of the things the farmer had to buy had fallen 35%. Thus, the farmer, on the average, had to use twice as many bushels of wheat, twice as many bushels of corn, <sup>twice as many bags, twice as many barrels of cotton</sup> twice as much of all of his products, in order to buy the same amount of things that he needed. The closing

of that gap was an important objective of <sup>the</sup> Administration, and we shall bend our efforts to hold the gains that we have made. The gap which, was the measure of the farmer's despair and distress ~~has~~, after ~~two~~ and a half years of effort, ~~been~~ in large part <sup>has been</sup> closed.

Many factors were involved in this readjustment. Our monetary policy was one. The drought was another. Increased demand for products caused by the economic revival was another, and the operations of our Agricultural Adjustment Administration was <sup>still</sup> another.

I need not tell you of the origins and the purposes and the methods of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. That is history, and, I submit, honorable history. Moreover, the farmers know how the Act has worked. They know from the contents of their own pocketbooks that their income has been increased. The record is there to ~~show the figures~~ <sup>prove the case</sup> — an increase of \$1,000,000,000 in farm cash income in 1933 over 1932; \$1,900,000,000 increase in 1934 over 1932 and an estimated \$2,400,000,000 increase in 1935 over 1932. That makes a total increase of \$5,300,000,000 over what the farmer's income would have been if the 1932 level had been continued. Is it surprising, in the light of this improved income, that the farm implement factories in Illinois and New York and the automobile factories of Michigan, and the steel mills of Pennsylvania, are springing into activity?

Is it any wonder that smoke is pouring once more from chimneys long smokeless? Is it any wonder that workers long without regular jobs are going back to work? Now, with export surpluses no longer pressing down on the farmer's welfare, and with fairer prices, farmers really have a chance for the first time in this generation to profit from improved methods. With agriculture on the way to a condition of prosperity, it is possible now for the farmers of the country, in cooperation with their Government, to look to the longer future.

Three years ago, in the desperate struggle to keep ~~the wolf~~ <sup>himself</sup> from the ~~door~~ <sup>threshold</sup>, farmers, no matter how much they might have wished to adopt cropping practices that would conserve and build the fertility of their soil, were compelled to raise ~~as many~~ <sup>more</sup> bushels of wheat and corn or pounds of cotton and tobacco ~~as~~ <sup>than</sup> their land ~~would permit~~ <sup>could properly sustain through the years</sup>. But with this compelling necessity now passed, they can put scientific crop rotation systems into effect and save their soil fertility. That, my friends, is of equal interest in Pennsylvania and in ~~Kansas~~ <sup>Wisconsin</sup> and in ~~Rhode Island~~ <sup>Maine</sup> and in Georgia. The dust storms that a few months ago drifted from the western plains to the Atlantic Ocean were a warning to the whole Nation of what will happen if we waste our heritage of soil fertility, the ultimate source of our wealth and of life itself.

I have not the time to talk with you in detail about what the Government is trying to do to prevent soil erosion and floods, to encourage forestation, to give people

the opportunity voluntarily to move off submarginal land and on to adequate land where they can make both ends meet -- in other words, to use every square mile of the United States for the purpose to which it is best adapted. That in its accomplishment is a ~~dream~~<sup>project</sup> of a hundred years. But for the first time in the history of the Nation, we have started ~~towards that goal~~<sup>on that project</sup> because for the first time we have begun to understand that we must harness nature in accordance with nature's laws, instead of despoiling nature in violation of her laws.

Perhaps the most important gain of all is the development of the farmer's ability, through cooperation with other farmers, to direct and control the conditions of his life. Programs now in effect under the Agricultural Adjustment Act are planned and operated by the farmers themselves through nearly 5,000 county production control associations, which are manned by more than 100,000 committeemen and which number among their members more than 3,000,000 adjustment contract signers. The Government's part in this program is merely to supply the unifying element that the farmers themselves, in their past efforts, found so essential to success. That, it seems to me, is the true function of Government under our Constitution -- to promote the general welfare, not by interfering unduly with individual liberties, but by bringing to the aid of the individual those powers of Government which are essential to assure the continuance of the inalienable rights which the

Constitution is intended to guarantee. It is democracy in the good old American sense of the word.

The Government's policy toward agriculture has been evolving ever since the time of George Washington. I know it will continue to evolve and I hope no one thinks that the present machinery is perfect and cannot be improved. What counts is not so much the methods of the moment as the pathways that are marked out down the years. I like to think of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, not merely as a temporary means of rescue for a great industry, but as the expression of an enduring principle carved in stone by a Nation come to maturity — a Nation which has forever left behind the old irresponsible ways of its youth, a Nation facing the realities of today and prudently taking thought for the morrow. I like to think that never again will this Nation let its agriculture fall back into decay, that instead the farmers of America will always be able to guard the principles of liberty and democracy for which their farmer ancestors fought. I like to think that agricultural adjustment is an expression, in concrete form, of the human rights those farmer patriots sought to win when they stood at the bridge at Concord, when they proclaimed the Declaration of Independence, and when they perpetuated these ideals by the adoption of the Constitution. Methods and machinery change, but principles go on, and I have faith that, no matter what attempts may be made to tear it down, the principle of farm equality expressed by agricultural adjustment will not die.

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You who live in this section of Nebraska occupy what is very nearly the geographical center of the United States -- as much land west of you as lies east of you, as much land north of you as lies south of you. It is, therefore, fitting that at this place I should again pay tribute through you to the great farming population of the United States and those dependent on them for the splendid courage through long years of adversity which you have shown -- to the pioneering spirit that would not quit, that made the best of well-nigh hopeless conditions -- that had enough faith in yourselves and in your country to keep your balance, your perspective, your good nature, and your continuing hope. Today you are marching along with heads still held high. Your hope has materialized, at least in part. Your faith has been justified. Your courage has been rewarded. All that I can ask of you in the days to come is that you maintain your fine spirit, that you maintain the team work that is proving its success.

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