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ORVILLE L. FREEMAN

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Jane C. Freeman April 17, 2005

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INTERVIEW IV

DATE: November 17, 1988

INTERVIEWEE: ORVILLE FREEMAN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Freeman's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: You were saying, with regard to the food stamp program, it was something you really had to coax him [LBJ] along on, that he was reluctant to do it.

F: Yes, he was reluctant, and that was not the result of a lack of concern, but a genuine feeling, or at least a big question in his mind: "Was this the best use of resources?" and, "Once you feed people, why, it's gone, and how much better off are they?" I would say, "Now, Mr. President, you don't want to go down in history as one who did not support feeding hungry people. I don't want to see that on the history of your administration. I want to see you out in front leading on this issue of reaching people in need of food. I feel very strongly that if we are going to be forced by circumstances to cut back production in agriculture in order to bring some balance in the marketplace, why, it's almost a moral necessity, in my feeling, that we do everything we possibly can to feed people in this country. It is just immoral to cut back production and still have hungry people and not try to do something about it." [He would say], "Well, okay," and then I'd go on along, hammering away.

It took a lot of doing because there were a lot of people in Congress that were not too sympathetic. The civil rights issue got into it; that was the fundamental, underlying problem, basically.

G: You mean, in terms--?

F: Civil rights people, yes. They felt this related to--and a great many people who would get the food stamps would be people that were in the South and in these areas. This was not stated but that was an underlying feeling at that time, particularly in some of the key positions in Congress. Some of them are still there in Congress, but that's no longer true. So what they had to do, in effect, was to build a coalition.

In order to pass a farm bill, we got the labor [people] and a number of the human rights kind of people to come in and say they'd vote for a farm bill if the agriculturists would vote for a food stamp bill and if the committees would allow the bill to progress. But it took a lot of doing over an extended period of time, and it finally passed in 1964 in the fall. And I was elated; it had been a long, long trail. We had been operating under an administrative order, utilizing Section 32 funds for four years, and we had built up--I have forgotten how many.

This was started--our doing that--by an executive order that I put out that President Kennedy supported. He was very anxious about getting a food stamp program started because he'd been out campaigning in a lot of the mine heads and places around the country and he had witnessed firsthand something he didn't even dream existed, [which] was really genuinely hungry people. So the first executive order that he put out, within hours of the inaugural, was to open up the list of direct food distribution [centers], which was a program also using Section 32 funds, where agricultural commodities and so-called surplus were then distributed directly, and he extended that list for maybe six different commodities to twenty-six--I've forgotten exactly. Then he said, "Now, let's go to work on our food stamp program."

Well, our food stamp program had broken down pre-World War II. It had been badly managed and administered, so for that reason a lot of people in Congress also had reservations about it. So I called in some people in the department and worked them over a while and the general counsel said nothing could be done, and finally we came up with the idea of using these Section 32 funds and saying that [if] any food that was in the marketplace had components in it of a certain percentage that were not at 90 per cent of parity price, we could therefore use Section 32 funds. And that was almost everything.

So we opened up the thing and opened up the first four about a month afterward--maybe it was eight. The first one was in West Virginia--I can remember very well opening it--and then went on gradually expanding it, and in the process by managing it well, which I think we did, we overcame the hesitation of many in Congress because of the previous experience.

But as vice president during that period, to my best recollection, President Johnson did not have any particular exposure to any part of this program and there were lots of other programs to go, but he let me go ahead in connection with it and it finally passed. I was waiting for him to sign it and maybe have a little ceremony--I had put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into that--and he didn't sign it. He took it and went to the Ranch for Christmas, and I tried to call him a couple of times, and he wouldn't take the call. That was about the only time he would refuse to take a call, so I knew he knew what I was calling for and he wasn't about to do it, so I had just about given up. I was home and working in my office, getting on towards midnight, and it would have been pocket-vetoed by midnight. When I went in the next day--when the white telephone rang it was the President and he said, "Now, Orville, that goddamn food stamp bill of yours,

you know, I've never been too excited about that damn thing, but I know that you're for it and if you're for it, I guess I'll sign it." I said, "Well, gee, that's great." "Well, if we're going to sign it we might as well get some mileage out of it." It was then ten or eleven o'clock. He said, "Get hold of all the people on the Senate and House Ag [Agriculture] Committee and tell them to meet us in the Cabinet Room and they can all witness the signing." (Laughter) Typical LBJ, you know. So I got hold of the White House operator, and, sure enough, they rounded up quite a few. I've got a picture in my office of the people that were there in the outer office for that signing.

(Interruption)

F: So he signed it. He also--speaking now of the food stamp plan--went with me a long, long way on making available food to India in 1964 and 1965. I don't know how well that was covered before.

G: You discussed it, but maybe next session we can go into that in some detail.

F: All right, I'll look at that, because this was one where we had to build support because it was ten million tons two years running. It was a major program and we got Congress lined up and he supported that to the hilt.

One other thing on the food stamp thing, it gives you an example again. Once you got the food stamp plan, the question was how do you get the appropriations, and how do you move it up?

G: By move it up, do you mean expand it?

F: In amount. You see, because it started off--I've forgotten--the first year after we had the bill, maybe it was forty or fifty million dollars, you know. What is it now, twenty billion or something? But it was the same fight all over again to get any kind of appropriation

with his kind of coolness on it. So when the budget was put together, I've forgotten exactly what I did, but I went through enough steps to clear the air, that I thought I could contend that this had gone through the appropriate budgeting procedures and it had been accepted by the President as a part of the budget. And I never really highlighted it nor did I ever on purpose talk to him about it, and I think I was moving it up a very significant amount. I was testifying--I forgot what committee; I can remember the room very well--and someone came in with a note for the Chairman and he said, "Mr. Secretary, we'll adjourn this hearing for a little while and then return and continue it. There's someone who wants to talk to you in my office." And it was the President. He said to me, "What in the hell do you think you're doing?" I said, "What do you mean? What do you think I'm doing? I'm testifying for this committee in support of what we have in the budget for the food stamp bill." He said, "I didn't know anything about that. I didn't put that in the budget," and some appropriate phrases, *et cetera*. And the net result of that was, he said, "Get your tail down here. I want to talk to you about this. I don't think that number is an adequate number." So he had gotten an [inaudible] and it wasn't a big item in the budget, but he saw it and he figured I was kind of trying to make a semi-end run and he called me in the middle of testifying.

G: Tell me how this whole hunger controversy came up. Remember Senator [Joseph] Clark and Robert Kennedy went down to Mississippi and I think they met with you when they came back. Can you describe that sequence of events in your. . . ?

F: I don't remember too vividly. We were doing everything we could, and step by step that thing was moving and growing. There had been also a big television program on hunger that was really very unfair. I mean there were just a lot of--

G: CBS?

F: Yes. Frank Stanton and I called them and raised hell about it and tried to get them to make some corrections in it, because I felt that it would be really counterproductive. Because we had really worked terribly hard on this. We had gotten a lot done on it, and the progress made was ignored and they ran this thing which was quite inflammatory. In retrospect, it served a useful purpose because it did get Congress started; it got Clark started, and then it got Bobby Kennedy started. And when they went down this got more and more publicity and highlighted the fact that there really was a major hunger problem. George McGovern got involved in it and that built support on these hearings. They did come back and talk to me in connection with it and I just said to them, "Well, here's the legislative history of this. Here's what we'll be getting from the Congress. Here's the amount of money we could get. This is no news to me. We've been fighting this battle for a long, long time, and the people that have been fighting it and the people that are managing the program, and I think doing it well, are discredited in a significant fashion in connection with this." I kind of resented it and let them know it in no uncertain terms. Well, it was getting publicity; it was getting attention, and there was a real need; you don't shut members of Congress up in that fashion, and so they kept right on.

Then they had the march on Washington and I couldn't even get in the department and all the rest of it, which was a part of that period.

G: Tell me what you faced on Capitol Hill in terms of trying to expand the program through the Agriculture Committees and through the Appropriations Subcommittee.

F: Just couldn't move it. You couldn't move it.

G: What was the sentiment on the Hill and where were the obstacles?

F: Well, the obstacles were just where you said: in the general legislation committee, in the House more than in the Senate. There were people there that just--

G: That was Bob [W. R.] Poage in the House.

F: I don't remember Bob Poage quite as much, though. That was Harold Cooley. Poage came along a bit later and Poage would not have had any connection with it. Cooley, you [could] never get your hands on him. He would just slip and slide and not say anything and he wouldn't show up for a meeting or a conference and he said it may happen. And then there you think you had the votes and then somehow they'd slip away, and then when you really got down in it, you'd find the chairman probably did it without telling you when he said that he would put it through now. He was very difficult to work with.

I don't remember exactly--I could go back and count them [?] and it would be interesting to recollect just exactly what it was. But in the first place, it was just that there were a lot of people who weren't excited about it because it had a bad history in terms of loose administration, pre-World War II as I said, and they weren't sure the food stamp program could be made to work properly. Then, [second], there were these differences that related and particularly you had some political overtones. No one would say too much about it but we knew that a considerable number of southern members of Congress in both [houses] just were not supportive of that.

G: The fact that the beneficiaries were blacks?

F: Yes, sure.

G: Well, how did you deal with this?

F: By putting together a combination and building enough votes, by getting the labor guys in when they needed votes for farm bills and programs and build a coalition and finding

some of these guys that were in key positions. [They] just were good enough politicians to know they didn't have the votes, so they went along. Then you had to do the same thing in building up to get the appropriations. Once you got that, you still had a long way to go. You had to get your appropriations before you could really expand the program, and some other kinds as well, but when this attention was paid in the march and all the rest, and when the Senate got in it as strongly as they did with some really leading figures, then that built the kind of support; why, it broke loose and got to be a very significant program.

G: Do you think up to that point that the Agriculture Department was aware of the extent of hunger in these Delta areas?

F: Yes. Pretty much. I was. I'd been around the country a lot on this. We had a rural development program that I--the rural-urban balance that I had worked very, very hard on. And we set up what we called Technical Action Panels in all three thousand counties, or tried to. There were four or five USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] programs in every one of the three thousand counties in this country. I mean, the magnitude of the Department of Agriculture is very, very extensive and not realized at all. There are five thousand Ph.D.s in the USDA, so it's really a tremendous establishment. So I just directed that in each county in the United States, some of them particularly, that these would get together and form what I called a Technical Action Panel and they would take the initiative to go to the local leadership in those counties and work out a development program for the total county. This is what we did.

So in the process of that and then going out to a lot of these and touring and traveling the country myself, which I did, and spent a lot of time, and the only time--not

only, but mostly the areas where they really moved were the areas where I had gone personally and insisted that they should and then moved people that weren't moving them. I guess by the time we left office half of them, half the counties, had that kind of program. They weren't all too effective. So I had a pretty good idea that this was a major problem because I had been out and looked at it, in Maine and several--not only in the South, but in a lot of other places, too--in the rural areas; I did not go into the cities, although, yes, when it came to the school lunch program, I went into the cities and reviewed what they were doing in a number of places.

G: There were some criticisms that the food stamp program and school lunch program weren't really addressing the poorest of the poor simply because of the way the programs were set up in terms of how much the food cost, and the food stamps had to be distributed in lump sums; you couldn't just buy them by a day's worth or three day's worth. Did you feel that this was a legitimate issue?

F: No. Well, there was bootlegging, and there was black market operation, and people would sell them; you would always have to deal with some of that. Nothing was perfect, but, no, I think in the main the program was well-managed. You could say that the program was not liberal enough, that it didn't give out enough stamps, but people who were in a certain income bracket were entitled to get X number advanced. I've forgotten the formula. That worked, I think, quite well. I don't think there was very much legitimate complaint there. The area that was very difficult was we also continued a direct distribution program. Here you had the problem because local authorities didn't have any machinery to handle that. That was sometimes very poorly done.

G: You had to deal with the county welfare--

F: Yes, you had to deal with--whatever county wanted to get into this kind of program or a locale, why, they would have to set up a committee that would handle that, and we would then make the food available for them, or a certain number of items that they could distribute. That was administratively difficult and our food stamp program wasn't much better, but there were a number of places where it didn't go into effect or the appropriation was not enough to cover it completely. See, now the program is a ten- to twenty-billion-dollar program. It's a big program.

G: Let me ask you, then, to recount your discussions with Ralph Abernathy and the Poor People's Campaign when they came in in 1968. They occupied offices, didn't they, at Agriculture?

F: No, no. I'm trying to remember. They kind of picketed the place. I remember when I went to the office, I went in around the back and went in through a back door rather than those I usually came in. And they weren't too bad. If we'd had a really very difficult session, I think I would have remembered it better. I think I told them I would be happy to receive a delegation of a limited number, and I would be prepared to review and discuss any complaints they might have, and I particularly would encourage specific reference to shortfalls. And they came up--I've forgotten how many--and we spent an hour or two talking about various things that could be done, but they really didn't have much by way of specific information in shortfalls. It just wasn't a big enough program. Of course, this was a wonderful issue for them and for Abernathy and the whole problem of who's going to run the black movement. So they marched in and camped out and picketed and raised hell, and that was the politics of the time where that's concerned.

So, it was just more a matter of feeling put upon because we had really done a lot--not enough, but we had done as much as we could and we'd really worked very hard at this from the very beginning. And to have them not distinguish that and to come storming in, you know, as if, instead of being a benefactor in offering this, you were a--I don't know what the phrase would be, but an evil force.

G: Do you recall Jesse Jackson's presence there?

F: No.

G: Of course, this was right at the time the President was having a major battle over the tax surcharge and trying to get that through Capitol Hill at the same time Wilbur Mills was insisting on a six-billion-dollar budget cut. Do you recall the pressure from the White House not to expand these programs in order to--?

F: Oh, well, there was always pressure from the White House and from particularly the Bureau of the Budget, often the Council of Economic Advisers, in terms of the programs and the budget. This is when you almost always had the major battle. When the budget was in and you'd been back and forth a few times, why, then, always during the Christmas holiday LBJ would bring the various cabinet officers and top administrative heads individually down to the Ranch, and then with the Council of Economic Advisers and the Bureau of the Budget, we'd go over that budget and that's when the battle would take place. He would sit there and listen and then he would make his decisions and then there would be appeals from those decisions, at least in my case, and quite a number in all these cases, which he would then take under consideration. So it was a kind of a bloody process.

G: But in June 1968, I guess it was particularly a problem because he did have this struggle with Congress over the tax bill. Do you recall any White House meetings in which you pressed your case and fought for this--?

F: Well, I can remember several instances when I appealed a decision that had been made in relation to fixing the price support level, particularly on corn, which was really symbolic, and prevailed. I felt very strongly about it; it wasn't a great amount, something like ten cents a bushel, but symbolically it meant a great deal. I felt strongly about it, and he went along with me despite the opposition of the council and the Bureau of the Budget.

G: There was one meeting that has been referred to, I think in June, where you had proposed [a] $145-million expansion of the commodity distribution and the food stamps. [This was] right in the wake of the resurrection of the Poor People's Campaign and there was an indication that the administration would go along with this, and Joe Califano had signed off on it but the President rejected it at this meeting. Do you remember that? Does that sound--?

F: This was 1968?

G: Yes, June, 1968.

F: No, I don't remember that. I remember talking with him and being very sympathetic in connection with the tax thing, that he felt that he should go to Congress and fight for that additional tax even though he was not going to continue himself and that he owed that to the country and to the coming administration, the coming president, whether it was a Democrat or Republican. It was a hard fight but he felt very responsible in having a balanced budget or close to it, and I tried to help in that battle. That was a long time ago. (Looking through papers) Is this the one he turned down?

G: Yes.

F: You know, I don't hardly remember this. It'll be interesting to go back and look at. . . .

G: Perhaps your diary will--

F: Oh, I'm sure that would be in there. I've got the vaguest kind of recollection. This is the one he turned down. Now, this would have been--was this before or after the Abernathy march?

G: I think it was right after that.

F: Right after that.

G: Do you think LBJ felt that the administration shouldn't give in to this kind of pressure that Abernathy and the marchers were applying?

F: He never said that to my recollection; again, I'd have to go back and read this section. I'd be interested myself. You know, you never really knew why he did some things. He wouldn't very often say. He would just do it and then when you'd try to get an explanation, why, you just didn't get one. He had his own reasons. So this made it sometimes very difficult.

He was more difficult to work with in that sense than Jack Kennedy, because Kennedy was very well-organized and he had some excellent staff people who had been with him for a long time. He had a policy pretty solidly in mind, the direction he was going on, and these guys like Ted Sorensen and Mike [Myer] Feldman and Lee White were very able, and you could depend on them that they could speak for the President; and ninety-nine out of a hundred times they would be right and they knew what the policy was--any of them. He had a half a dozen like that, that he could convene a meeting of cabinet officers and could work out some arrangements when there were juris-

dictional conflicts and problems of that kind, and this was not similarly true. The operation was quite different. Nobody could really speak for LBJ, and you could never be quite--well, it's not quite fair to say couldn't be quite sure, but he would do some very unorthodox things. He was more of a pragmatist in a sense that he would kind of move with the times and the place and the people, but something like this--it improved a lot. He didn't really have a chief of staff, so to speak. He operated in that sense in having people that were assistants to the President, but the only one that I can remember who really, I thought, handled the traffic at least of appointments and things like this very well was Joe Califano. I think he was quite [inaudible] through Joe; otherwise, why, it was very difficult sometimes.

G: Do you think that LBJ worked out some arrangements with the congressional leadership in Agriculture, the people like Jamie Whitten, and Spessard Holland not to expand the program beyond a certain--?

F: No. No, I don't think so. I had no reason to believe that at all. If he had done it, and I'd found out about it when I was for it, and he hadn't said anything about it, I would have resigned in a minute. No, I don't think so. It was just what you said earlier, neither he nor Jack Kennedy paid very much attention to Agriculture. Now, Jack Kennedy did on the food side of the thing; that he felt and supported keenly. In all fairness, when LBJ got in on the foreign thing, the India situation, and some of these, and part of international policy, and Public Law 480, why, he got into that. In this instance, he called them down to the White House and we had quite a number--it was a billion-dollar program, you see, under PL 480. But on this one I have no reason to believe that on anything to do with Agriculture that he ever went directly to members of Congress in connection with it.

They both pretty well turned that over to me and I would, of course, get presidential clearance in terms of a policy direction, but then it was my baby.

G: Let's talk a moment about the policy itself. Was it a policy really derived from the need to pay farmers for the surplus rather than the need to make sure that poor people had enough to eat?

F: It was to make sure poor people had enough to eat. It didn't have really an impact in terms of the farm programs proper, in terms of price support levels and the acreage taken out of production; that was a different bag entirely.

G: Are you talking about just the food stamp program or the commodity distribution program also?

F: Both.

G: Both of them?

F: Both of them. They were completely set aside from the farm programs and the farm income question. No, this was a humanitarian effort. Well, the fact that we had, at times, significant carry-overs--I don't like the word surplus; I've always said that when there are hungry people you don't have a surplus, you ought to get it out there to the people who need it, whether it's here or worldwide. But the amount that you would distribute on direct distribution programs did not have any really significant impact in terms of the total volume of production that would affect price in the marketplace. We would have to set a certain level of farm support price--be prepared to--and then loan against that and then if those loans were not paid because the price went down, take it over and it would go into storage. Then you had something of a problem of using it at that point rather than storing it, but the volumes--this is where very significant volume like the India one

moved out around the world and the volume of that--and these were bulk grains, primarily, you see, bulk commodities. They were such things as corn and sorghum and wheat and soybeans, and a few other things of that kind where you need to get those prices up, and we were dogged then from the very beginning with overproduction capacity in relation to domestic needs. It was 10 per cent then; it's 40 per cent now, you see, the miracle of American agriculture on the productivity side is probably the greatest in the history of the world. Just think of it. Only two million producers on the farm produce enough food to feed us better and cheaper in relation to income than anyplace else in the world; [we've] got 40 per cent of that productive potential left over that can move out in other areas around the world and should much more effectively.

I'm the president of the Agricultural Council of America now, and I'm fighting this problem just as hard now as I did then, only I don't have any power now, which is frustrating. But, you see, we can use those commodities and, of course, what we did demonstrate in those years is that if you have development and you can use food for that development in Third World countries with heavy population, you build markets, and the increase in exports in the seventies was enormous to Third World countries. We'd build billion-dollar markets all over the world and it was a part of what we called, in the sixties, the action triangle, I used to call it, which was a humanitarian food relief, economic development, and commercial market building as a package program adjusted to a particular country. So the Taiwans and the Koreas and at that point the Mexicans and Spain, all became, in the seventies, billion-dollar customers and that was why, in the seventies, agriculture was at a bonanza. It's the only time in our peacetime history when

we didn't fight surpluses and low prices, and then we are fighting shortage. The word surplus went totally out of fashion.

Then it was a keen shortage in the seventies and a real concern, and as a matter of fact, right now--it shows you how quickly agriculture can change--there's been such a precipitous drop in carry-over worldwide that there's a real serious question, if we should have a repeat drought, that the world would be on a very short supply. And it's turned over in a combination of the drought, plus an increasing demand, along with some improvements in economic development around the world and significant amount of acres that have gone out of production. We could very well, in a year, be in a position where the world is not producing enough food to even feed the people adequately that we're reaching now, which was the situation, if you remember, when they had a World Food Conference in Rome in 1974. [Henry] Kissinger went out and made lots of noises about feeding people; so agriculture can go up and down just like this, just like a pendulum. But there was not enough volume in these food programs to make that big a difference in terms of the price front, so this was a humanitarian thing.

G: Do you think, in retrospect, that the food stamps were too expensive? Should they have been cheaper?

F: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I think we thought that this was reasonable and, as I recall, the formula fluctuated at income levels in terms of the number of stamps. That never even particularly came to my attention, that I can recall.

G: Some of the critics of the southern members of Congress, particularly the Agriculture Committee, claimed that these southerners were using food policy to drive the blacks from these southern areas to sort of compel them to move North.

F: I heard that. I never heard a southerner say that he was doing that. They may very well, in their own minds, or they might even talk about trying to do that. If they were, why, it was quite successful because a tremendous influx during this period went North.

G: Did you get a sense that that was their motivation?

F: No, not in that fashion. They were not comfortable with a program that reached out into these concentrated black areas, and it was just kind of a part of the psychological make-up, so to speak. They just wouldn't say much about it, but as I said earlier, they just would drag their feet and nothing would happen.

G: Could OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] have done more in this area? And should OEO have been the agency to be involved?

F: I don't think they could do more. I mean, they didn't have very much influence on the Hill. This was a problem on the Hill. Matter of fact, in dealing with the Hill they were usually pretty inept.

G: Now, you created a Rural Development Service in the Agriculture Department which would focus on helping the poor, and housing, education, food, water, everything.

F: Total development program, to support some of these poor counties.

G: Where did the idea come from for that?

F: It came from me. It wasn't too complicated. You had these programs; they were going on there, and you're concerned about low-income people, why, any dummy could figure you better use the programs you've got and put them together, and then the question wasn't what to do but how to make them do it. You know, they were off in their own programs; they didn't have time to do this because they were doing that. Secretaries of

agriculture come and go, we're going to be here for a long time. You just had to fight that.

But we built pretty good morale on it, because I did something rather strange that I'd never heard of before that I kind of stumbled into, which was I literally, for five years, had a staff meeting every single morning, and for a broad group of about fifty people that were the top managers of all these programs. We would get together for coffee at eight-thirty in the morning--starting time was nine--and we'd spend a half-hour just talking about things that were unique in what we were doing and I would outline and we had five major objectives, and the interaction between those objectives I was very conscious of; so there was a unified approach, and the administrative heads and the Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service and Agricultural Marketing Service and Food Service and Research and Extension and there were maybe twenty if all the top people were there. If I'd been up on the Hill, I'd tell them what was going on or if they'd had a cabinet meeting, what was going on, or if it was in the paper, what was going on, and they'd respond and then I'd select various ones to make a five-minute presentation of things they were doing, problems they were having, how someone else might be able to help them. This went on for five years. I periodically said, "Now, this isn't a command performance. If you don't want to do this, why, just say so and we'll drop it." They loved it. Some of them said they'd been in the department for twenty-five years and they didn't even know who some of their contemporaries were in other agencies within the department.

So it wasn't really a staff meeting, in the sense of decision making, but it was an information device. But it did bring us together and we were able to set goals that we

wanted on the international [scene], on the food thing proper, on conservation, and on food and [inaudible] policy--there were five of them--and they did interact. So this was just part of it and this was tied in to the rural-urban balance thesis, you see. I made dozens and dozens and dozens of speeches on how foolish it was to jam more and more people in less and less space. What you fundamentally had to do was go out in the rural countryside and create some of the amenities and opportunities that would get people to stay there and run competition with the cities, and I used FHA [Federal Housing Administration] and REA [Rural Electrification Administration] for loans for golf courses, ski slopes. I got hell sometimes from Congress and a lot of people that I was spending money, but we did what we could with it.

G: How was the Rural Development Service administered? Was that through the county agents or was it through some other group?

F: We had a rural development director, at assistant secretary level. Everybody in the department then--this was the purpose of having these kinds of meetings every morning, to know what was going on, you see. And his was really kind of a super-staff position, and then he--this directive that there were ongoing programs in all these counties. So the direction went out from Washington to the people who were the top people in all these programs in each county that was designated, and that they should do this. This was a directive that went through the top people here. At my insistence it started with me to them to do such and such, which they did out there to the counties in the field, and then, as I say, I went all over the country periodically and went into these counties and sat down while they were doing this, and then reported back to them what we were doing.

But they didn't last even a couple of months when another administration came in. They dropped them right away.

G: Did they? Was it the administration or the congressmen on the Hill that--?

F: No, no. The congressmen on the Hill never objected to this at all, nor did I consult with them, particularly, in connection with it. I would go in for--I passed two pieces of legislation in connection with this as a part of the 1964 farm bill. One was a kind of a conservation approach that called for [a] law that counties that were topographically related, like in a watershed, under this particular law could come together and plan multiple-county arrangements for handling that physically. And the Soil Conservation Service worked on this, and the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service in part, with the local people there, to try and have--and we would call those resource conservation districts, and [it] was modestly successful--I've forgotten how many there were.

Then I also passed as a part of that bill a law calling [?] the same thing couldn't be done on the human affairs side in terms of welfare, health, *et cetera*. The [inaudible] department would be involved in some of that, and there they could put together multiple county objections. Of course I learned something which I already knew but that was reinforced, is when you've got objectively quantifiable targets of things you can do, like a stream that's going through three counties and certain kinds of hills in relationship in a row, something you can see and do, why, you can really move it. When it's the intangible of hunger or need for welfare or people programs or the rest of those things, why, that didn't fly at all and it partly didn't fly for the other reason, because it got into the civil rights thing, because a lot of the people who needed that help on the human side were

blacks and the black/white thing meant that in many places it just simply didn't happen. This plus the fact, as I said earlier, if you can quantify it, put a number on it, set a target and a goal on it, then you can press towards it, but if it's a little more subjective it's very, very hard to get people to move.

G: There was an observation that when the food stamp program was adopted, and when the counties moved over from the free commodities to the food stamps, that participation in the food program dropped by about 20 per cent or 40 per cent. Was this a concern to the administration?

F: I don't remember any concern in connection with it. I think it was symbolic of the fact, in terms of a demonstration of real need in connection with this, which was administratively required in the food stamp plan; this was so loosely handled under the direct distribution program. By definition you were moving commodities that were in surplus supply, and you're probably just as well off getting them out of storage and not paying storage on them. So there just wasn't the same discipline, so to speak, in connection with it. I think the numbers you're referring to were more the result of that than the other.

By the way, while I think of it, I have only one copy but I'm sure you must have it in the Library or they must have it in the USDA. I made a report to the President in 1968. It was about that thick (showing measurement), and it reported in terms of the segments I'm talking about, which was a detailed report, and you might--

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

F: This is a report to the President. I made a report to the President each year, and I did not do this for Johnson, I don't think, because he wasn't receptive, but for Kennedy I made a report, a memo report, every week. I wanted to do that because I knew from the

beginning that in Agriculture, which is usually embattled and within the administration it gets short shrift on balance, that if I was going to move and get things done I was going to have to be able to reach that president. Of course I was fortunate enough that I had relations with both of these men. I had nominated Jack Kennedy, and I'd known Lyndon Johnson for a good many years and then during the time that he was vice president, so I could get to the President, and people knew it. I didn't like to do that but now and then I would. So I had those weekly memos and LBJ, as I recall, wasn't too receptive, and then I tried to lobby, in effect, the people in the White House. I'd get [Ted] Sorensen, or Elmer [Staats?] or some of these people or Walter Heller, among others that succeeded him, get them over to the department, send them information, try and educate them. There was a hell of a lot of difference between agricultural economics and industrial economics and we never did have--even Walter Heller, who was my tax adviser when I was governor of Minnesota--and I introduced him to Jack Kennedy. As a matter of fact, I had a hell of a time with Walter even, because they had the, you know--so you just keep banging away. You had to do that all the time.

I spent a lot of time, particularly the first year, on the Hill. The first piece of major legislation passed in the Kennedy Administration was a major farm bill. [We] had to do something; we ran out of storage space. That was the difference between now. Everything was full including the mothball fleet, and we were producing significantly in excess of our needs in market. What the hell do you do? It was a nightmare. So we hammered that through. This did make a little history, and LBJ was involved; we passed that. When I first went to [Allen] Ellender and Cooley and said we had to do this, they said, "That's impossible; you can never pass a major farm bill that controversial in sixty

days." And I said, "We've got to pass it." I gave them the reason why and they agreed to try and help but they didn't think we could do it. Well, we got it through the Senate nicely. We got it through the House finally at the last minute by two votes. It was that close. And we had a meeting already set up to try to launch this program, which would take land out of production.

In Kansas City, [I had] an airplane standing by, and I had to get that damn bill, once it passed, signed by the President, and it had to be signed first by the Vice President and by the Speaker, and I only had an hour to do it. Normally it takes you three weeks when anything like that is circulated through the whole bloody government. But I broke into a Texas delegation where [Sam] Rayburn and Johnson were, and got them to sign that. I hand carried it over to the White House and took it in--Jack Kennedy knew about it ahead of time. He signed it and we were on an airplane the same day it passed. [We] had a good turn-out and we got on top of that thing the first year, and we never had to deal with a very serious surplus problem for the balance of the eight years.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV