

THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN FARMER: A SUMMARY
OF THE PAST AND COMMENTARY ON THE PRESENT AND THE POSSIBLE
FUTURE

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE

by
Martha Noakes
June 1965

In the early days of this nation, farmers lived a lonely life of rugged individualism, and were neither a conscious nor an organized political force. As transportation and communication rapidly developed following the Civil War, agriculture began to realize its commercial possibilities, and farmers organized to serve their business and political needs.

The early prosperity of the 1900's was followed by a post-war loss of markets to foreign agriculture. This brought on vigorous political activity by farmers, culminating in the dramatic legislation of the mid-thirties, through which the federal government became deeply enmeshed in the development and execution of agricultural policy.

The groups which shaped this policy, and do so today, are principally the general farm organizations and the specific commodity associations, as well as government employees, the colleges, and private business which sells to or buys from farmers. While these influences are not always united in developing farm policy, they have built a strong American agriculture which has done much to bring this country to its position of world leadership.

Much of the farm legislation over the years has dealt with research, credit and disposal programs. In support of these proposals the farm groups have been unified and successful. On the other hand, land retirement,

price support, production controls and marketing regulation, all of which have direct economic impact upon farmers, have been a source of controversy among the farm groups. Since their establishment during the New Deal, these programs have been constantly revised and reshaped, and while they are still extensively criticized, no permanent alternatives have been as yet proposed and accepted.

The political prospects of farm people are clouded by declining voting strength and legislative reapportionment. Their influence, nevertheless, should continue to be substantial as farm organizations are forced into greater unity and their elected representatives recognize the balance of power they may hold.

It is likely that the nation's urban dwellers will develop a growing appreciation of the importance of agriculture to the well-being of all citizens. There is evidence that farmers, even though a rapidly declining minority, may exert considerable political influence in shaping the policies of this nation.