

AAM Senter On The Hill 2-18-20

In February 1978, Delegates from each State that was elected by grassroots AAM supporters to represent them at meetings, began working with Congressional Members that supported AAM's goals. We concentrated on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees where AAM had numerous supporters to begin the process of drafting legislation to be introduced in Congress to achieve Parity Pricing for commodities, as well as label imports as to the country of origin. Many long hours were spent by AAM Delegates agreeing to a concept that everyone would support. One of the proposed concepts was drafted by Senator Bob Dole, a powerful Republican Senator from Kansas who wanted a voluntary approach where producers could choose what worked best for them. As the draft was circulated, several Democratic and Republican Senators agreed to support the concept and after making changes working with AAM, Dole's Flexible Parity Act was introduced. The concept was that if a producer idled 50% of their land, they would get 100% Parity Loan Rate for their production. The formula continued down the more land you planted the lower Parity Loan Rate you would receive until those that planted all their acres did not qualify for farm programs. In thinking about it maybe this would work today to reduce the surpluses and allow producers to get a fairer price from the marketplace. I'll continue March 1978 in my next column, now on to 1979.

Farmers arrived in the Washington, D.C. area beginning February 2nd and 3rd 1979. Farmers in Maryland and Virginia had located areas to park off each interstate, so everyone could enter D.C. from every direction, Monday morning the 5th of February. Our group, the I 20, I 85 and I 95 group parked at Pohick Park just south of D.C. in Virginia where we rolled in there Friday night February 2nd. Saturday was a day to rest up and visit with farmers while some of us rented cars and drove into Washington, D. C. to check out where we were going Monday morning. It was like an army sending out scouts to check out the enemy's positions. Of course, we noticed a few guys in new overalls and jeans wearing dress shoes walking around our camp, when you asked them where they were from, the answer was 'down south'. Yep, we were getting checked out too by undercover officers who would later play other rolls in the unfolding saga. No one knew what we would face Monday in our Nations Capital where the plan was to drive in and circle the Capital Building then head back out to our camps. Then Tuesday we would make the same trip then head out of town again, but the best laid plans sometimes don't work out. I have to say Washington's traffic has always been bad, add thousands of tractors, campers and trucks and you have gridlock. Our group made it to Independence Ave and 14th Street which is the address of USDA and we couldn't move any further so I backed my tractor up on the steps of USDA where they had locked the iron gates and I chained it to the locked gates. Everyone then started getting out of their tractors and walking around. We heard later that farmers leading the group up Independence Ave ran into lines of armed police who were breaking out windows of the tractor cabs and dragging farmers out. In one instance teargas was fired into a tractor cab and the farmer was not let out and he lost his sight. On the West Front of the Capital, Senators and Members of Congress were giving speeches as well as a few of our AAM leaders. We noticed that a few tractors were being started up and were driving out

onto the Mall. Word spread that AAM should move all the tractors to the Mall, so we did. After most had moved onto the Mall which covered it from the Capital to the Washington Monument the speeches continued then we noticed that trucks, buses and heavy equipment was surrounding the Mall. We found out that the undercover agents had gotten keys from the tractor manufacturers and they started moving the tractors onto the Mall as a way to surround us, they thought they had trapped us but AAM leaders from each state met and decided they had given us the perfect campground, the US Mall. It was walking distance to Congressional Offices, well lit up and safe and it would save all that fuel driving in and out each day, plus all the D. C. drivers would be much happier with the farmers than if they were stuck in gridlocked traffic each day. In late February farmers began giving kids rides on their tractor during weekend days, AAM worked out a plan with D.C. Police Chief to let a few tractors out to tractorcade to the Lincoln Memorial and a few other places, then Washington was hit with a huge record setting snow storm, around 2 ft. in one day. Washington was shut down and the Police Chief asked for help, could the farmers help the Fire Department and assist ambulances, plus bring doctors and nurses to the hospitals. The answer was 'yes', so, the army of tractors with big blades on front headed out. The police handed out radios to some and most farmers had CB radios so they could communicate with the farmers and tell them where they were needed, in one case a lady in labor was being taken to a hospital and the farmers was pleading with her to wait until she got to the hospital to have the baby. Tractors pulled firetrucks and ambulances to calls and cleared parking lots and roadways. Prince Georges County Maryland issued a Proclamation thanking AAM farmers for saving lives during this emergency, farmers were glad to help because that's how they always react when someone needs it. As the days went by, farmers became friends with the police officers guarding them, congressional staff and many D. C. residents.

On February 16th, 1981, thousands of farmers took their trucks to Ristine, Missouri to remove Wayne Cryts soybeans from a bankrupt elevator. Wayne had stored his soybeans at harvest and received warehouse receipts for his beans. These receipts mean they are private property and he has title for those beans. A Bankruptcy Judge ruled that all soybeans in the elevator would be sold to pay the debts of the elevator. So, against Federal Marshalls and local and State Police, AAM farmers went into the elevator, removed the beans and each farmer that had a truck took a load home with them and sold the beans and gave Wayne the cash. Each truck was weighed, and receipts kept so that the Federal Marshalls knew only Wayne's beans were removed. Wayne spent time in jail, but several states along with Congress passed laws to protect private property in the event of a Bankruptcy. It was interesting that in the trial that followed, Wayne admitted under oath that he took the beans, but the jury found him not guilty.

Writing this history is bringing back a flood of memories for me and from the reaction I've received from the readers of this column that was part of this historic event it is also bringing back memories which are different for each person that participated. For those that have not heard the stories and are following AAM's history, I hope will lead you to standup and be heard

and never give up. Join AAM and help us move into the future supporting our young future farmers and ranchers and supporting young producers who are struggling now to survive. Till next time,

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