

AAM Senter On The Hill 9-24-20

35 years ago, this week, I along with thousands of AAM members attended the first Farm Aid in Champaign, Illinois. In August Willie Nelson called Corky Jones who at the time was AAM's President and me to ask what we thought of having a concert to benefit family farmers. We told Willie that we thought it was a great idea and AAM would give our full support for his efforts. September 1985, family farmers were in a depression, not seen since the late 1920's and early 30's with record foreclosures, bankruptcies and farm suicides leaving Rural America on its knees.

The farm crisis was brought about by a failed farm policy that was written to benefit the processors and grain traders. Congress followed the money and slowly beginning in the 1950's removed the floor price of commodities. Then in 1985, Congress took the final step of dismantling the Regular Commodity Loan program and replace it with what was called a Marketing Loan that allowed prices for farmers to drop to the world price which was and still to this day is below the cost of production. That is the plan pushed by processors and grain traders to buy raw commodities below the cost of production which would allow record profits for them and leave farmers losing money.

The Farm Aid Concert received national attention, over 50 entertainers paid their own way and came to the all-day show. Farmers that were struggling to survive realized they were not alone, that other people cared about what was happening to them. Farm Aid received letters from farmers who said they were considering suicide but now have decided to fight for their farm. Willie said at the time, we will keep on until the problem is solved, well once again this year, we are in another Farm Crisis.

Saturday will be Farm Aid 35, and once again Farm Aid will provide the stage for family producers to tell their story. The Corona Virus has been hard on everyone and has caused great pain for many. The ray of hope I am seeing is that the Virus may have opened the door for changes that will benefit family producers because consumers want to buy from US farmers and direct if possible. There is a big push to build new infrastructure such as smaller meat packing plants spread across the country which would provide additional competition in the marketplace for meat producers, plus give consumers the ability to buy direct.

AAM's support and thanks goes out to Willie Nelson and the Farm Aid Board. Farm Aid staff does an incredible job and family farmers and ranchers owe you a big Thank You. The show is Saturday September 26 at 8 PM EST and will be live streamed from the Farm Aid website farmaid.org. It will also be carried on ASX TV and Willie's Roadhouse on XM Sirius radio. The show will have great talent and for the 35th year I will be attending, the only difference is I will be at my daughter Amy's home watching it livestreamed. I will miss seeing my Farm Aid family, but I know we all will be together cheering on the entertainers and supporting Farm Aid's work.

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