

**FORM WITHOUT SUBSTANCE, PAST OVER PRESENT:  
THE INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE OF NATIONAL U.S. RURAL POLICY<sup>1</sup>**



William P. Browne  
Department of Political Science  
Central Michigan University  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is about how members of Congress and their staffs make policy. Most significantly, it shows how they use information and sources of information in their work. The theme is that Congress is a reactive institution, organized and bounded by rules that limit its members' choices. The emphasis of the theme is on the reactive. The secondary concern is with the limits members face in deciding.

In a sense, this book is also about four particular things, at least in the sense that academics must write somewhat artificially about their subjects as unique ones. Readers will find that the following chapters deal theoretically and empirically with:

**A Modern Congress in a Postreform Era.** There are significant questions about how Congress operates in the 1990s. As Kenneth J. Shepsle notes, our textbook notions of the way policy is handled within Congress are changing.<sup>1</sup> Institutionally, Congress is indeed different today than it has been in the past. As much as possible, this analysis will explore how Congress has changed in its policy responsiveness.

**The Role Played by Congressional Participants in Policy Networks.** The idea is well accepted that interactive networks of regular participants from Congress, the administration, organized interests, and assorted other nooks and crannies of a complex Washington matter collectively in policymaking. Most of that acceptance is premised on the assumption that routine meetings produce policy results because getting together matters. These results, presumably, reflect the exclusivity of the networks and the specialized expertise and authority of the participants. To a great extent, this book adds to the network--or, as some say, the "iron triangle"--literature because it deals with the involvement and

influence of very nonspecialized players in core issues of different policy networks. In particular, it suggests changes in how networks operate.

**The Politics of Places.** Much of the analysis in the following chapters finds that members of Congress respond first to their districts and to specific informants from those places. In the sense that Congress is explained as changing, those shifts are attributed largely to factors of place as these are better served under modern structural arrangements. These dynamics, the explanation goes, are what undermine the exclusivity and specialization of congressional network participation.

**The Failure of Rural Policy, as Trapped in an Agricultural Policy Domain.** The context for our analysis of congressional involvement is agricultural and rural policy as a domain of public decision making. The domain idea is very simple, yet theoretically in need of further development. Basically, the policies and issues of a domain are considered as a single entity, bounded by the prevailing order of congressional committee and administrative agency jurisdictions as well as the integrating mechanisms of the budgeting process. Yet, unlike networks, no one set of players routinely meet in an attempt to bring order to the domain. Thus, domains reflect institutional configurations of rules while networks are organized around specific behaviors.

In a practical sense, domain policies are what congressional participants treat as an holistic, though certainly not coordinated, package. Numerous policy networks are active in any domain. This book shows the failure to develop meaningful rural policies as a problem inherent in domain politics. A rural policy network barely evolves because certain farm issues, with a collectively-defined domain purpose, historically crowd rural initiatives off the policy agenda. Little in the way of a policy base exists then to sustain rural network

activity. In part, that crowding out of rural advocates explains continued long-term congressional neglect of things labeled rural.

*Circular problem*

The more contemporary part of the problem of rural neglect is that constituents in rural places seldom organize around generic rural issues, preferring instead to deal with more location-specific problems of their own home places. This behavior, however, is linked to the previous patterns of policy neglect. Specifically, if there existed a more extensive base of programs, these could then be modified for more rewarding place-specific distribution. Rural residents, in this case, would be inclined to raise more of a hue and cry about rural problems to their reactive members of Congress.

*but also, how can they be an integrated part of programs that keeps bonds?*

Obviously, though the book is about these four topics, the treatment of each of them is interdependent. To attempt to understand the reactions of Congress without emphasizing who it is that members and staff react to and what they react about is largely futile. This book, even with its theoretical focus, attempts to be very specific. The intent is to remove the abstractions that are so inherent in many studies of congressional institutions and behavior, without resorting to a case study. To this end, an extensive range of systematic data are used in the explanation and analysis of how Congress operates in its management of the agricultural policy domain.

In no small part, this book is a sequel, or at least a second stage. It follows an earlier study on interest groups of this domain as suppliers of information.<sup>2</sup> That study leaves open the question: How do the users respond? It takes on importance as the starting point for this current research because the interest groups study left a curious puzzle. Specifically, why were organized interests so careful about what information they provided to Congress and other policymakers?

*What talking about*

Agricultural domain lobbyists and activists are selective about more than just the spin, or the biasing, that they give their information. There exists considerable avoidance of seemingly relevant arguments, types of information, issues, and entire public policy decisions by all interests. Even when an organization takes a public stand on an issue or pending decision, there may well be no lobbying follow-up or any acknowledgement to public officials that the statement matters at all. Quite the contrary, interest representatives often acknowledge their posturing on such occasions and candidly note--from behind closed doors--that they cared but little for what they said through the media. As on the electoral campaign, these appear to be 30-second sound bites whose life span ends when broadcast.

*Or threaten their #*

Selective use of information and selective attention to issues and policy decisions, this earlier work shows, results from strategic considerations of each lobby. In particular, organized interests lobby from an issue niche, a well-considered range of issues that they feel compelled to address for reasons of their own political legitimacy and credibility.<sup>3</sup> Other issues are routinely excluded, often because the organized interest's resources are limited. But issues are also routinely excluded when addressing them would cost the organization credibility in the eyes of policymakers.

What this behavior suggests is obvious. Apparently, there are many things that members and the staffs of Congress simply do not want to hear from any particular interest group that they use as an information source. In short, to put it another way, there are only some things to which otherwise reactive congressional members will listen and respond. What are these messages? And why do they get attention? More importantly, what does this mean to public policy deliberations? And, of course, what else is preempting some issues and policies?

Those were the questions that moved this project forward, that bridged the previous study on the limits of interest groups to this one.

The importance of these four questions makes this book of interest to more than just a variety of political scientists. The political science audience, nonetheless, remains a major one since no one has explained the relationship between policy networks and the structural changes that have taken place in the era of a postreform Congress. The intent then is to fill a theoretical and empirical void in both the network and congressional literature.

The other two audiences, and ones that gets equal treatment, are the analytical agricultural-policy community and the rural-policy-advocacy network. Both face applied problems because of limited and inadequate information about Congress and why its members listen. To an extent, the two are overlapping audiences. The analytical community of agricultural policy specialists is broad ranging. It includes agricultural economists, rural sociologists, some natural scientists, and numerous administrators and staff professionals of assorted academic background within government, from universities, and from the private sector. As part of a functional agricultural establishment, these agricultural-community participants address an incredibly wide array of policies and issues, from farm price supports to environmental degradation. They do theoretical analysis, applied research, education, outreach, and policy implementation. Some of them are influential, others are no more than on tap to justify politically desirable positions. As a collective community, however, Congress matters to their work and they need to understand that set of institutions better.

The agricultural-policy community tends to be exceptionally reliant on old truths and often misapplied myths in understanding Congress and public policymaking.<sup>4</sup> Traditionalists tend to see the process being driven primarily

by numbers of voters within the electorate.<sup>5</sup> Thus, with a shrinking farm population, traditionalists seek urgently to expand the services provided by their establishment.

Others, particularly those trained in public-choice economics, perceive the policy process to be driven by mischievous and monolithic interest groups. Interests, conceptualized by these scholars as extractive rent-seekers, promote inefficiencies and a lack of economy in public programs. They are, therefore, the recognizable villains in whatever policy failures the processes of government create.<sup>6</sup> Policy reformers, though mixed in exactly whom they blame, tend to agree with that view.<sup>7</sup> This book attempts indirectly to refute each of these positions, maintaining instead that Congress produces very much what the public wants. If agricultural policies are uncoordinated and often fail to do what the rhetoric surrounding them claims, it is because the grassroots public that uses these many programs is diverse and splintered by place and sector. Moreover, within that changing public, the old farm clientele of Congress retains a great deal of very legitimate influence without corrupting anyone.

Rural policy advocates are mostly outside the agricultural-policy community, often from universities outside the land grant system and from nonagricultural government agencies. But, because their work goes on largely within the policies of the agricultural domain, their commitment to rural rather than farm issues keeps them peripheral participants in the policy process. Within the current expansion of agricultural establishment services, rural advocates and their issues are taking on useful if quite restricted importance. They offer yet another approach to providing relevant services through the agricultural establishment. As a result, a much smaller but equally wide-ranging band of rural advocates are networking with considerable difficulty alongside

other advocates of both old and new issues in agriculture.<sup>8</sup> While encouraged to interact and plan by many in Congress and the administration, their efforts have been faintly rewarded. Their initiatives often have been brutally rejected. This book, in no small part, is intended to demonstrate to these advocates why their policy rewards are so few. Understanding the reasons, and realizing more about the importance of particular rather than generic local places, will hopefully lead them to better strategies and tactics than merely networking among the experts.

Careful readers will note that the three audiences and the design for this book are quite compatible with one another. There is no need to assemble a patchwork quilt of ideas to satisfy the needs of each one. Quite the contrary. The focus on network interactions and domain consequences brings the topics of academic concern directly to bear on the problems of the book's second and third audiences. The only caveats that must be applied are these two. First, the perspective of the book is primarily that of political science, where most of the theoretical work on which it is based is housed by discipline. Second, given the emphasis on non-disciplinary problems, the text often extends to what may seem to many to be simple and unnecessary clarifications. Such ideas as log-rolling, vote-trading, and coalition-building are not always understood by everyone as having the same meaning, even when they are doing those things. Readers should excuse what may seem for them to be a few wasted elaborations.



# THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY AND INSTITUTIONS<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The national government has and probably will for the foreseeable future do nothing that really matters in eliminating the causes of rural poverty. At most, U.S. policymakers may create marginal relief, easing the pain somewhat for those who live in poverty. There are two reasons why policy efforts for the rural poor will continue to have little substance, disguised behind a thin veneer of political rhetoric. The first reason for persistent rural poverty lies in the larger failure of policymakers to discover--much less apply--the many remedies needed to alleviate U.S. poverty in general. Only a few of the conditions that create poverty have been addressed (James, 1972; Katz, 1989; Jencks and Peterson, 1991). That reason, however, is not the primary subject of this analysis.

The concern here is more narrowly focused. Even if a more effective national poverty policy would be developed, the rural poor would be left behind gains made in urban areas. The problems of market and social failures in rural America, in general, are different and in many ways more severe than in metropolitan regions (Rodgers and Weiher, 1989; Flora and Christenson, 1991). This brings forth the second reason for persistent rural poverty: the near total inability of U.S. governing institutions to deal successfully with the wide range of rural needs. This analysis will explain why.

The persistence of rural poverty and the lack of solutions for rural policy problems should not be taken as an indication that government and its officials are villains, however. Nor were public officials stupid and ignorant. Rather, the fault, if it can be termed that, lies in the institutional arrangements of

*which one?*

?  
2 reasons for policy failure but you ID 2 reasons for poverty

?  
How different reason for rural poverty?

rules and organizations of agricultural and modernization and development that have evolved, for more or less logical reasons, over 130 years. Operating with imperfect information about long-term food needs and the capacity of farmers to produce more, these institutions created a fixed social investment and a resulting political momentum that, especially in a democratic society, was hard not to serve and protect. Unfortunately, where majorities rule and where their values determine policy priorities, both long-term government planning and even short-term adjustment to new conditions became exceedingly difficult.

why since 1860?

whose? Majorities from orgs?

Determining what actions to develop better took place within a burdensome maze of largely farm oriented rural institutions, each of which was wedded to its own prior performance rather than a comprehensive view of contemporary policy conditions. Unfortunately, even that performance is largely irrelevant to the needs of most rural residents today. In essence, rural governance has been captured and held by its past and its myths. Because this past once created great policy success and many personal rewards for selected beneficiaries, it left a legacy that is hard to let go even in its largely outmoded form.

What?  
What do you mean?

This intro is very enlightening.

**ORGANIZING THE ANALYSIS**

I have very little sense of your intentions.

What is rural governance?

The following analysis forms a lengthy thread that first reviews earlier literature and then makes use of original empirical data. To explain the failure of national rural policy, this and a later chapter will examine both policy substance--or what rules get passed--and the process by which substance is determined--that is, rulemaking. Institutions, as both governing organizations and as rules of governance, have developed as outcomes of policy decisions; therefore, the substance as the explicit content of policymaking must be understood because it truly matters. But, in addition, the creation of institutions brought forward restrictive sets of procedures, or rules, that

What?

What sense are you in?

do you mean laws? Here?

technical term? Or do you mean the leg. process?

govern the means of determining who gets what from public policies of the future. For rural residents and regions, this means that whatever they are allocated through new policies is filtered through the structure of the old. Through institutionalization, or the imbuing of principles in law, a rules and an organizational dependency has been created. The result is that public policy proposals usually will not advance far unless they are compatible with existing institutions. This produces equilibrium, not policy reform (Shepsle, 1986, 1989). The rural poor and those otherwise left behind in the modernization and development of U.S. farming have been the hardest to fit within this balance.

The first half of the analysis will focus on the slow and politically tedious development of agrarian and rural policies and institutions over time, to show the precise nature of what policies have disadvantaged the rural poor and how the political process has worked towards those ends. The first section traces the ~~historic~~ evolution of farm policy as a necessary antecedent of U.S. rural policy, a pattern that once fit for most of the nation.<sup>2</sup> In section two, more recent but largely unsuccessful attempts to define rural policy as distinct from farm policy are covered. Section three, in turning to the procedural aspects of agrarian policymaking, describes the emergence of protective, farm-directed governing institutions into a concentrated yet highly decentralized national politics.

This analysis is carried further in a second part, on current problems of governance. Its first section will review the difficulties faced by organized interests in representing effectively rural people and problems in a decentralized government, especially in overcoming the dilemma posed for groups who through lack of historical precedence have no established political standing.<sup>3</sup> In the next section, the representational dilemma shifts to Congress

*In this case farm inst. leads to inst. policy perfectly fit*  
*farm org. ... ? 2-23*  
*farm org. ... ? 2-23*  
*farm org. ... ? 2-23*  
*farm org. ... ? 2-23*

*intentionally ?*

where rural policies present uncertainties and pose significant risks for legislators who might otherwise wish seriously to advance them.<sup>4</sup> The final section of that part of the analysis explores why the combined effects of past and present politics imply quite negative prospects for policy change of any consequence for rural America. Throughout the text, the early portions of each section explain the central theme of what will be covered and preview key points.

*→ I would have given up here. No hypothesis, no logic for your descriptive 'thread' as described.*

#### RURAL POLICY AS FARM POLICY

Farm policy was an early product of U.S. government, one that reflected the nation's status as a rural society of farmers and those who depended on them. Indeed, farm policy was rural policy. This merged or coterminous identity of farm and rural remained largely unchallenged in politics for well over 100 years. If there was farm policy, so the logic evolved, there was no need for separate rural initiatives (Osborn, 1988a, 1988b). But the common identity of farm and rural policy, albeit in its numerous provisions, does not explain sufficiently why rural needs were attended to inadequately. Both the origins of farm policy and the distributional means of allocating its benefits to most of rural America were relevant factors (see Figure 1) that will be explained as important in this section.

Several specific variables will be covered, beginning with cultural justifications. As John M. Brewster felt, humans either consciously or subconsciously "act on beliefs and 'first principles' whether or not these principles can be shown to have metaphysical truth" (Madden and Brewster, 1970:2). The origins of farm policy were found in the agrarian vision that guided a westward expansion and settlement. Jeffersonian democracy, as ideology, relied on an agrarian myth of the hardworking yeoman freed from the corruption of

cities. This ideology emphasized not the need for food and fiber production, but rather the hope of creating producer landowners as a stable social base. Thus, the costs of encouraging producers to multiply were worth the price of government action.

Need more on this

As the following will show, however, the myth of agrarianism, even with its deep roots in objective reality, and the initial farm policy tools it inspired proved inadequate for keeping farmers and ranchers on the land. Overproduction of commodities soon became chronic--not surprisingly, since policy was prompted by what society hoped to sow rather than planned according to the imponderable, what farmers needed to grow. The history of U.S. agriculture, in response, became one of ongoing policy escalation in a constant and losing battle to keep farmers and ranchers in business despite low prices.

But of course for some farmers, it was quite successful

Most rural ag folks may not agree with this policy for various reasons

Can you give examples?

It was not just the losing battle against farm losses that led to rural policy failure, however. Certainly, rural communities suffered as the producers they serviced exited agriculture. But changes in farm policy--as the core foundation of institutionalized social values--also contributed. Over the years farm policy shifted from the provision of collectively-distributed goods, as policy benefits, to which all could share if they made an effort, to new programs that emphasized selective distribution of benefits to designated individuals who gained entitlements on the basis of special status.

Unfortunately, when finally targeted independently of farm programs, rural public policy proposals were wrapped inextricably--that is, institutionalized--in what was, at least for rural places and people, an inappropriate distribution process. The process worked most comfortably when specific benefits could be handed out to identifiable constituents. Also, because it was controlled by an agricultural establishment, that process remained driven primarily by agrarian

ideals as opposed to a desire to find new goals for rural policy.

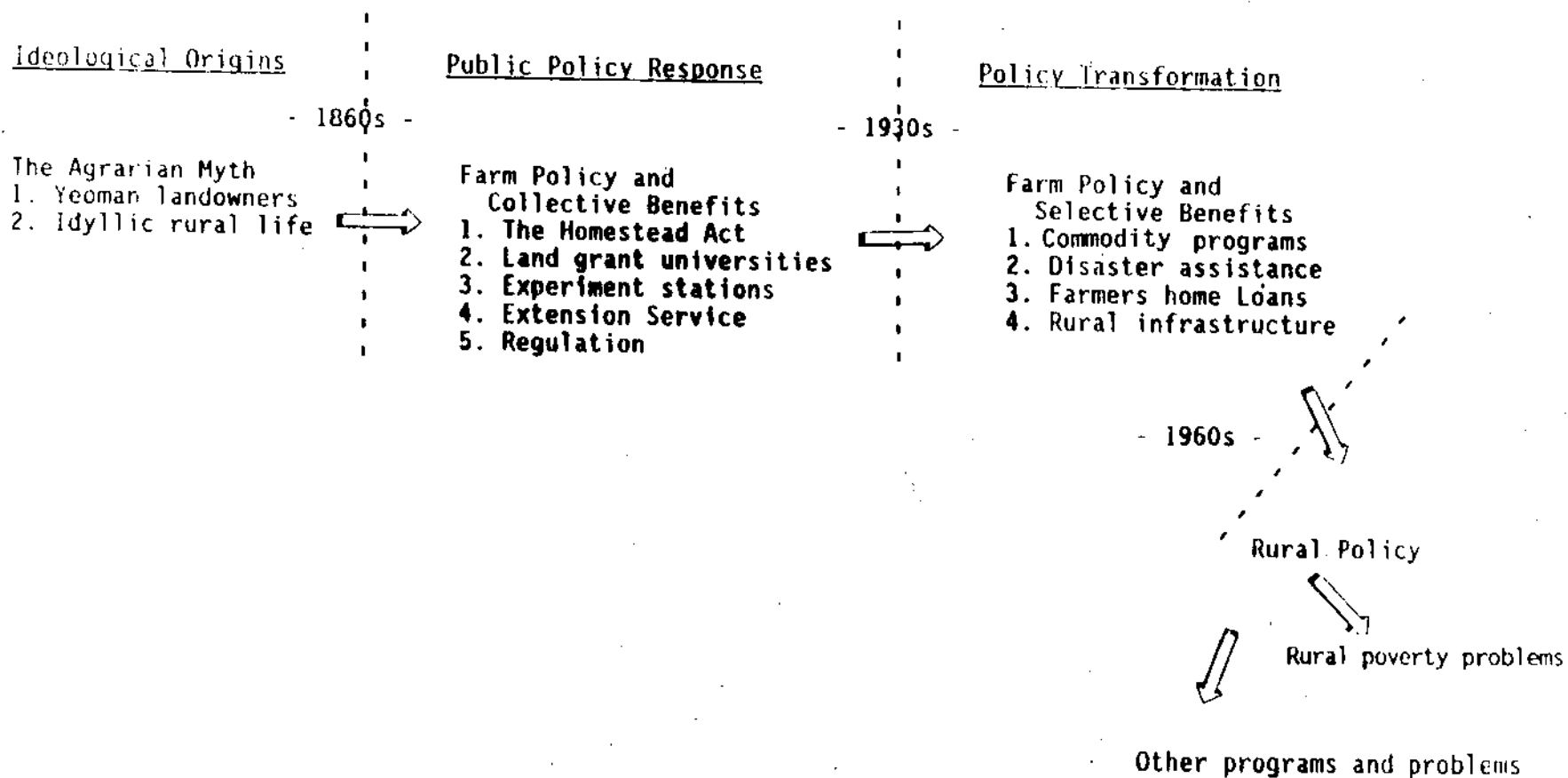
[Insert Figure 1 about here]

### The Agrarian Myth: Fundamentalist Vision

Sometimes the importance of beliefs to politics is forgotten. Yet, it must be remembered, public policy has never been made without choosing between values; and, in a democratic society where all values big and small are articulated and pursued, choices were always difficult. Choices could not be determined or decisions be made under such conditions without some help in moving toward consensus. Brewster's "first principles," as a consequence, mattered. Shared value beliefs that were common to society (and passed on intergenerationally) proved especially potent in bringing consensus (Bonnen and Browne, 1989). The images that they conveyed in ordering factual observations as more or less important to one another had positive, normative, and prescriptive content. All three facets of content were used to order more easily a public policy solution or a set of solutions. That is, observers fell in line with what became conventional reasoning. "By simplifying complex solutions, these ideas help many diverse people to cooperate toward the same goal. They define the situation and justify a particular course of action" (Johnson, 1968:77). To that extent, agrarian ideology became defined, and also reified, within protective agricultural institutions. The latter were created due to the former's existence.

The ideology of agrarianism, accurately or not, was credited to Thomas Jefferson (1984:290,818) who nonetheless articulated well the beliefs that became common to the emerging culture of the new America (Brewster,1963). Jefferson, while embroiled in the design of a workable democratic government, argued that "political power should be vested not with the elite, but with the common farmer"

FIGURE 1 THE PATHWAY TO RURAL POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES



(Thompson, 1988: 36). The landowning yeomanry was able to balance the unsavory conditions of blight, mobbism, political favoritism, and bossism that were likely to make an urban nation ungovernable without a strong central economic authority. After all, the rural farm provided a far healthier--perhaps, even in some instances, an idyllic--environment than could the city. Owning some small part of that unspoiled environment determined, theorists hoped, that one would protect both it and the government that guaranteed its boundaries.

In that sense Jefferson's views were compatible with those of James Madison (1961), who argued that, despite the likely "mischiefs of faction," the wealthy need not be depended on to rule. Factions, Madison argued, were able to counter one another; and Jefferson's dominant farm faction could preserve democracy by countering either the urban mob or moves to plutocracy by an industrialist class.

So the basis, at least, for an agrarian fundamentalism as a vision for governance was spun from one very dominating thread of early American political thought. Agrarianism was a template based on observation and philosophical hope, used as myths are "to organize patterns of information and patterns of informed reasoning", much like "scientific theory-building in modern societies" (Margolis, 1987, 109). The emerging agrarian myth, replicating much of the nation's experience, fostered and maintained a simple image of farming throughout society, and it was reinforced constantly as generations of Americans either struggled to farm or directly encountered those who did. As farmers took on near mystical status because of their widespread social importance, the myth surrounding them became equal parts fact and legend: farmers faced the uncertain vagaries of weather and climate that often left many of them destitute, they settled most frontier communities after adventurers and pathfinders blazed through, they nurtured scarce natural resources, and they did so at less return on their



investment than that gained by other economic factions within society. Farmers, their citizenship, and moral judgments took on the corners of a triangular relationship that sustained democracy. The early belief was born that these paragons of virtue worked harder than did the rest and, accordingly, deserved public support. The result was that policy claims made on behalf of farmers were well rooted empirically, easy to see, logical to follow, and, for the believers, nearly predetermined since the obvious social goal was the avoidance of an uninformed and inattentive peasant agriculture.<sup>5</sup> Thus, following the difficult travails of making public policy and law, agriculture became institutionalized.

#### **Farm Policy As Collective Benefits**

The existence of agrarian fundamentalism meant that public policy solutions, as both rules to advance farming and as organizations to govern the rules, were at once idealistic in their conception and perceived easily to be pragmatic in their purpose. While those who worked on farm policy lacked a coherent plan, political and administrative forces converged to offer solutions consistent with first principles of agrarian beliefs (White, 1958). Since the content of the myth was both well-grounded and subjectively appealing in an agrarian society where about half the population lived on farms, policy goals to address it seemed apparent. Offering competing goals would have proven less acceptable, perhaps impossible. Not much else was believable. This was true both of the solutions farm policy offered to social problems of the era, and of the process by which public policy benefits would be distributed to beneficiaries.

The 1860s were an ideal time for farm policymaking in concordance with agrarian imagery. The Civil War, with the secession of the southern states and their plantation agriculture, opened a window of policy opportunity because the

principal spokespersons for large-scale farming were removed from national policy debates. After 20 years of trying, proponents of agricultural development finally gained passage of legislation authorizing a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Act of Establishment of 1862 set forth under very broad guidelines a relatively minor federal agency empowered to take comprehensive action both to find and then disseminate any relevant information on agriculture (Gaus and Wolcott, 1940). This organization had, in particular, a scientific mission: the discovery and fostering of new seeds and plants. This mission, as the rule behind USDA's existence, mattered in that the new organization was to emphasize distribution of goods and services to producers as well as the promotion of the scientific enterprise itself (Rasmussen and Baker, 1972: 3-13). This was science for the people, farm science to farm people. While foresight may not have seen it, the scientific emphasis fostered social and economic development as a new and driving force in agriculture. This meant that the public policy product of simple agrarianism, not without irony, was directed at an early point toward modernization of traditional agrarian society.

Freed from the obstructing regional battles pitting northern against southern agriculture, Congress moved almost simultaneously on three other, though independent, farm policy bills. The Homestead Act legitimated squatting on tracts of open frontier land not sought after by private investors. Land was made available, while at the same time USDA could engage in research and education to alleviate the problems of those who settled there. The Morrill Land Grant College Act provided tracts of land to each of the states through federal property transfers in return for state investment in colleges that would teach agriculture and industrial technology. Finally, the Transcontinental Railroad Act, which also served other economic sectors, hastened farm movement west as

well as the exchange of farm commerce both to market and from input suppliers. This four-fold policy revolution of 1862 was still only a first stage, however. It required substantial elaboration and added policies as time went on and farm problems continued.

This sequencing was important for what evolved in turn over the years, both on the farm and in changing institutions. As the post-Civil War era saw agriculture spread West and as farms and ranches proliferated, the early returns on innovations brought forward by education and infrastructure increased farm productivity, and did so under conditions increasingly further away from subsistence agriculture. The combination of public and private investments began transforming the farm sector into a market-oriented, capital-intensive industry. Coupling an expanding number of farms and ranches with an escalating means of production brought forward the modernization paradox of public policy: each producer could feed more consumers, but consumers were not demanding that much more in products (Cochrane, 1979; Johnson, 1980). To lower costs and increase consumers' commodity purchases, government farm policy turned more to enhancing productivity and the efficiency of production. This (1) allowed for continued expansion in the number of producing units, (2) made producers more dependent on government programs while attributing more importance to agricultural institutions, and (3) renewed commitment to transforming U.S. agriculture further away from its European peasant roots (Goss, Rodefeld, and Buttel, 1980; Gjerde, 1985).

Several important policy initiatives characterized the intervening years between 1862 and 1933, the latter a point where farm policy was altered substantially ~~in its direction~~. Each of these initiatives coped with the paradox of modernization, creating lower producer incomes for at least parts of the

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sector. Experiment stations were added to the agriculture development work of USDA and the land-grant colleges in 1887, specifically to generate additional research. Black schools were added in 1890, primarily because of the large number of tenant farms of the South. When it became clear that education and research were not reaching many of the nation's producers and bringing attendant gains in efficiency, the Extension Service was founded in 1914 to deliver improved outreach at the county government level. The culmination of these three enabling acts finalized the broad, but unplanned outlines of a publicly-operated structure for what would be an evolving, as Schultz (1943, 1945) would later label it, agricultural establishment. Its collective responsibility was to provide for farmers (True, 1928; Hildreth and Armbruster, 1981). A fourth act aided that structural design. In 1889, at the insistence of farm groups from around the country, USDA gained cabinet level status and shed the remains of its image as a minor agency (Herring, 1936).

Other legislation, again evolving to meet practical farm problems of the moment, provided this agricultural establishment of public organizations a set of rules to employ on behalf of development goals. Most were delivered through USDA, or in the Food Administration of the 1920s that was later folded into departmental operations. A credit system provided loans to improve farm operations (Schultz, 1945). Agricultural marketing agreements, using public support for the cooperatives, brought together processors, producers, and commodity handlers for common action. The cooperatives were exempted from anti-trust laws to bring better cooperation among otherwise inherently competitive farmers. Regulations governing the middlemen between farmers and consumers were enacted to ensure that producers' economic failures did not result from the corruption of stockyards, railroads, and other agribusinesses (Benedict,

1942, 1950).

In addition, by establishing cooperative farm bureaus in local Extension Service offices, the federal government gave rise in 1919 to a Washington-linked grassroots interest group activism. While these farm bureaus were later ordered separated from the Extension Service of USDA, that move was not agreed to until 1954. By then, the locals had firmed up strong political support for the rules and organizations of the agricultural establishment within government (Kile, 1921, 1948; Block, 1960; Hamilton, 1991: 19). That support, especially through the Washington work of the American Farm Bureau Federation, eventually institutionalized private sector interest groups firmly within the establishment's organizational fold (Hansen, 1987a, 1991; Browne, 1988b). Even then, things were not complete. Institutional rules about who would get what would still evolve further. Public organizations, even with supportive interest groups, were not yet able to capture them as a permanent clientele, a set of customer organizations whose existence--and, therefore, establishment loyalty--was owed to specific public programs.

What characterized the legislative emergence of a publicly-operated and privately-supported agricultural establishment was its emphasis on general social policy, producing goods available to all, but requiring individual choices as to use. That policy was particularistic only in that it applied to an encompassing and very diverse farm sector, neglecting only unique rural regions where other extractive industries prevailed but that the industrial side of the land-grant colleges were still to serve. Meeting the values of an agrarian society led to efforts to improve agricultural institutions, human capital, and technologies. Eventually, establishment caretakers understood their role as assisting development of both the farm sector and the larger society and economy to which

it was a dominant part (Bonnen, 1987). The benefits offered by public policy were made available as collective goods, ones distributable to any producer or anyone who wanted to farm or ranch regardless of special status.

While all producers and aspiring farmers and ranchers did not take equal advantage of these benefits, the opportunity to do so existed. There were few exclusions. Yet, even if just all existing farmers would have used farm policy benefits, the resource investment of many would have been wasted. Not everyone could grow more productively and still find a market for their goods, at least without all farmers agreeing to produce just enough commodities that would easily sell. Of course, there was no such agreement or a central mechanism to mandate it. Thus, as modernization and development promoted greater industrialization by the 1870s, farmers found even greater price and income vulnerability. In the short term, both farm product demand and supply were decreasingly responsive to changes in price. But fluctuations in farm production did bring wide price swings. These were more easily taken advantage of by consumers, who paid comparatively little of their income for food, than they were by producers, who had sunk what became their family's immobile investment assets into agriculture. Producers, in consequence, had little incentive to vary how much they planted (Cochrane, 1979: 378-395; Johnson, 1980; Robinson, 1989: 2-18). There was little else they could do with their investments, and feelings of individual control over asset use were lost.

Modernization/development policy, as a consequence, created an early dilemma for agrarian producers. To fail to accept the practices advocated by components of the agricultural establishment meant failure. Rural poverty was ensured, or one left production agriculture and moved to urban jobs. Or, as an alternative, one adopted technology and produced more of already relatively

Duplicate?

oversupplied commodities. Of course, only the earliest innovators gained a market advantage; late adopters struggled in vain to catch up as overall excess production capacity grew (Johnson, 1980). Even in an era where technological innovation in agriculture was just beginning, the effects of this treadmill of forced change in production practices ensured that some producers would always face poverty while others prospered (see also Hamilton, 1991: 8-25). The creating of the agriculture establishment, with its emphasis on technology, brought more inequality in rural America than would have existed without that public policy approach.

By 1928, after several years of complaints of a farm depression following post-World War I price declines, it was clear that political demands generated by economic failure would change U.S. agricultural policy, creating some kind of a buffer from the free market. With so many farmers still failing, policymakers would have to modify in some way the developmental approach to spreading agrarianism through technology.

### The Policy Shift to Selective Goods

This change to selective goods in agricultural policy transformed institutional rules into ones that would alter distributional processes to better hold clients in their relations with policy providers (see Bates, 1981, for a similar yet more particularistic distribution pattern in Africa). The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 was not in keeping with the tradition of providing collectively-distributed opportunities to farm users and their families. Faced with a depression, U.S. agricultural development at least slowed in the early 1920s, and then continued to stagnate (Shideler, 1957; Johnson, 1985). In response, government developed new policy for the six most politically important basic crops, giving farm producers cash benefits for what they grew in

Here is one important point. First, then cull the last 50% of the pages to rack it up. There's no clear logic to the arguments.

explain or give a domestic ex.

order to keep them in business (Bowers, Rasmussen, and Baker, 1984). AAA was unlike the previous social policy tradition of U.S. agriculture, in that it provided entitlements to select types of producers, unique from other segments of society as well as other farmers and ranchers who raised different commodities (Bonnen and Browne, 1989; Bonnen, 1990). Commodity specific programs were also distributed selectively in that direct farm payments were based proportionally on the amount of crops grown by each beneficiary. This provided larger incomes for those who grew more.

Commodity programs, as a side effect, induced ever greater inequality among rural Americans. They did so not only because some farmers gained more than others while still other farmers and ranchers gained nothing. These programs also reduced the risks of expansion by establishing floors under prices, which kept total income to individual program crop farmers guaranteed through a combination of purchase price and supplemental government payments. This set in motion even greater incentives through increased payments that, when combined with less risk, led farmers raising basic crops to buy nearby land of their less successful neighbors. Larger scale farmers, with greater capital assets and with higher levels of incentives, were rewarded most. Escalating demand also ensured a ready market for the land of those who toiled but were left behind. Land prices were forced so high that many on the margins of production success could not afford--or, faced with a good offer, did not wish--to retain property rights. U.S. agricultural policy has since the 1930s fostered even greater inequality. In doing so, agrarianism and modernization/development, as complementary cultural ideals that merged the old with the new, gained the upper hand over whatever values U.S. society attributed to social justice through direct equality.

That point, where some values supersede the other, had not been reached by



any clear choice on policy direction, though (Herring, 1936; Skocpol and Finegold, 1982). The period 1928-1932 was one where government still wrestled with ways of providing, through equal opportunity, organizations and rules to distribute collective benefits of farming through public policy. The creation of the Federal Farm Board in 1929 was an attempt to develop a set of centralized commodity associations to control production and, therefore, limit price vulnerability. If successful, farmers would have been freed from chronic oversupply and the low prices that fostered greater inequality between producers who could and could not withstand such low prices (Hamilton, 1991). The Farm Board, under such conditions, would have been a prized addition to the agricultural establishment, even as it stood in contrast to components that generated more crops.

There was little hope of the Farm Board succeeding, however. The forces of modernization/development as well as nonexclusive markets, as these kept farmers from voluntary collective action in making planting decisions, were underestimated. Producers, quite simply, could not cooperate on their own volition with average cuts across the sector. Asset fixity-- as well as competition in those nonexclusionary markets from the many other atomized farm units in the overall structure of U.S. (not to mention international) agriculture--forestalled that choice. Surpluses soared, especially in wheat and cotton. If one farmer voluntarily reduced planting, that led only to immediate gains for those farmers who would not cooperate and restrict production. Without production controls mandated in policy, opportunistic free-riders who sought to gain by not cooperating proliferated (Olson, 1965).

The resulting decline in farm prices and the changing response of the Farm Board brought a death knell for general social policy as a distributional system

of collective goods. The flaw of the Farm Board and its reliance on volunteerism was revealed in ways not obvious under old organizations when, for example, farm offspring ignored the opportunity of land-grant college enrollment or when, in other instances, farmers refused to listen voluntarily to advice from extension agents. In those cases, only the single farm family was hurt directly. Farm Board failure, however, made the problems of collective goods all too crystal clear. "Farmers' backwardness, irrationalism, and excessive individualism" (Hamilton, 1991: 88)--that is, their problems with asset fixity and competition--meant that policy success was only possible if government either forced farmers to comply with policy goals or gave them extra incentives to do so.

Not surprisingly, given such policy choices, voluntary involvement in agricultural development was soon eschewed as a dominant public policy principle. The Farm Board, while it lived out its short time, moved into selectively-distributed rewards, as direct farm payoffs to specific types of producers, even before AAA was conceived. This was a major rules change toward still greater institutionalization of farm policy, farm groups, and their direct relationship to policy providers. The board financed commodity sales abroad for producers, bought grapes from growers, traded wheat for coffee, and bought commodities from producers and gave them to the needy. All were done grudgingly, by public officials who had not wanted to move in that direction, but were workable while voluntary compliance was not. Politics at the time of the Roosevelt Administration, in this sense, did not break tradition with the enactment of AAA. It but followed recent form in rejecting a farm policy based on collective goods.

There was still an important departure from the 1920s in 1933 political decisionmaking (Hansen, 1991). Roosevelt's strategists did deviate from the plans of the Hoover Administration in responding to demands from interest group

supporters of the agricultural establishment (Hamilton, 1991:237-250). Hoover's idea of the Farm Board had found little favor with either public or private agricultural policy activists. The Congress, under Roosevelt, accepted policy goals in AAA that reversed opposition, choosing to listen to farm interest groups and their producer adherents. If policy failed, farm representatives could always be blamed for both the poor performance and their own enthusiasm for what proved a bad idea (Hansen, 1987a, 1991). As groups gained legitimacy and their demands were met, programs proliferated. This led to a base of farm programs that, in only modified form, governed farming and ranching into the 1990s (Rasmussen, 1983).

The vesting of decisionmaking rights to interest groups had three profound effects on future farm and rural policy deliberations and the alternatives for distributing agrarian benefits. First, farm groups continued to resist the neglected option of mandatory compliance (for example, with soil conservation, production control) as a means of securing policy goals. Farmers remained relatively immune from regulatory action for decades. Second, along with the appeal of selective benefits over collectively-distributed ones, the continuing rise of agricultural interests--especially through single-commodity groups from the mid-1960s on--brought further reliance on narrow and very particularistic public policy goals (Browne, 1988b: 55-63). The easiest way to satisfy a specific group and its lobbyists was to design a government program of direct benefit only to them. Third, as that process and those means of distributing public policy goods came to be institutionalized in policy networks (see section three), the desire for more selective benefits gave rise to proliferating programs.

But new programs were not for all. Programs were most likely to pass when

they rewarded, as selected beneficiaries, already existing interests or ones that were emerging as newly strong. They basically went as price supports to growers of still other commodities, to ranchers as services and other means of lowering production costs, and to agribusinesses as standards and regulations that lent some a competitive market advantage. When a group or, especially, a non-identifiable public could not be organized easily to claim program benefits of their own, public policy rewards were unlikely to be forthcoming (see Robinson, 1991: 13-25). This, superimposed on a set of farm policies that already produced inequality as a result of underlying social values, led to a nearly unavoidable biasing of future policy in favor of those already a party to the agricultural establishment. Rural policy, as generalized social policy, came to epitomize the nearly noninstitutionalized outsider.

#### RURAL POLICY CAME ALIVE, ALMOST

The neglect of rural policy, under the conditions described above, should not have surprised anyone.<sup>6</sup> In effect, farm and rural policies were incompatible, the ideas behind them in competition. Institutions could not handle both as separate entities or for distinct purposes. General responsibility for rural problems, once recognized, always came to be seen as the institutional responsibility of USDA and other federally-supported agricultural establishment organizations: the land-grant colleges of agriculture and experiment stations. Farm income problems dominated their work. Despite the concern of early twentieth century government for the relationship between rural residents and their communities, rural nonfarm policies were "minimalist" (Swanson, 1989: 15). No inspiring mobilization of resources was ever mounted. No proactively-consistent policy focus was ever identified independent of farm

policy objectives. As this section will make clear, government recognition of a broader set of rural problems has been accompanied by only a cautious advance to deal with them, most often quite indirectly.

Rural programs have been of two types. The first type aimed to avoid what was demonstrated in the last section to be the impossible: keeping the multitude of farm families from falling into poverty. As noted, however, fueled by public policy and technology, farm economics meant that some producers unavoidably would be displaced by a policy approach reliant on modernization and development.<sup>7</sup> Yet public officials, focused on settling the frontier and stabilizing both democracy and plentiful food supplies, apparently never saw this as an ongoing inevitability (Hansen, 1991). Thus, the goal of keeping farmers in production and bettering their lots in life was a hard one from which to break, especially since subsistence farming always seemed a possibility of last resort to the family that failed to advance.

The second type of public programs offered to rural residents also never compensated for the human costs for those disadvantaged by farm policy. Rather, these policies were passed initially as additional farm programs, intended in this case to ease problems of life in rural areas where public services were otherwise lacking. All had a service mandate of their own for distributing specific policy benefits to farmers. Later, each was extended to other rural residents. Their intent, again because of a misplaced faith in the ideals of agrarian communities, continued to be the enhancement of technological development and better farm and ranch services.

If perceptions drove policy, those who structured policy debates either recognized too little about, or perhaps just never cared for, the problems of rural residents who were left behind and off the farm as U.S. agriculture

industrialized, modernized, and declined in farm numbers. Most likely, given the guiding myths that had surrounded agriculture and that drove modernization/development policy, there just never seemed much reason to look to the needs or at the problems of those who exited farming.

### **Identifying The Rural Poor: Farmers First**

Federal recognition of the rural disadvantaged and the need for a more comprehensive rural policy was first articulated in the 1909 Report of the Country Life Commission. That report, prepared with the urging of President Theodore Roosevelt, acknowledged that agricultural development had so far failed a large number of farmers, bifurcating the sector into the proficient and the poor. There were three other points central to the commission's critique, all of which came to be consistent and central themes of rural policy discussions well into the future.

First, substantial rural progress was acknowledged, and it was attributed to work done by the public organizations of the agricultural establishment. Second, the prevalence of quality of life problems--communications, transportation, health care, soil degradation--was noted for all rural residents. These deficiencies kept rural America from being its normative best, places of superior living. Third, the particular quality of life problems of those left behind were portrayed as important because of the dire consequences they held--not for individuals, but for rural communities and even urban areas to which the displaced fled. Decades of rural to urban and farm to nonfarm flight were recognized, but no recognition was given those who fled (Osborn, 1988b: 17-20).

The synthesis of the Country Life report was that a healthy rural society depended directly on a healthy, technologically-progressive agriculture. It emphasized that both were attainable, hinting at the continued search for the

idyllic. With that conclusion and those four points articulated, the federal government restated its commitment to industrialized agriculture. The poor, for the good of rural society, were to be freed from poverty's constraints before they exited farming. Better government services and greater technical assistance from agricultural institutions were to work their magic by increasing the economy and efficiency of production and distribution. Quite obviously, given the perspective of the Country Life Commission, the early developing reasons for farm failure and exodus had not penetrated policymaking circles.

Equally clear in that report was the non-concern for those poor who either had left the farm or had never been able otherwise to achieve success in a rural setting. The first attempt by government to link farmers to their rural communities thus ignored doing anything with those living in poverty, holding instead to investments in agricultural modernization and development as the appropriate farm and rural policy paradigm. In keeping with and expanding on the central belief of the agrarian myth, farmers came first because they would stabilize society at large, and now also the local rural community. Farmers' stature as the key citizen meant they were first in line both for the distribution of costly policy benefits and in the formulation of a normative prescription for the specific ills of rural America (Breimyer, 1983). Over the next two decades, as agricultural economists identified the still lacking needs of industrializing agriculture, these values were reinforced in similar calls for more comprehensive attention to the farm sector (Black, 1929). Neglected farm needs, as identified by economic theorists who believed that public policy would work, were substantively much like the quality of life service problems cited by the Country Life Commission.

A "farmers first" philosophy was so malleable as to adjust readily to

whatever disparate subjects were addressed in the rare rural community/poverty debates generated from then into the 1960s. Because the conclusion usually was about continuing routine development, only two rural controversies were noteworthy in even advancing alternatives. The Resettlement Administration, in 1933, aimed at removing the poor, locating them in environmentally-upgraded conditions, and equipping them to farm on their own (Kirkendall, 1969). Resulting policies were short-lived but remembered. Rejecting only the charges of socialism inherent in such a plan, the Eisenhower years brought forward a specifically designated Rural Development Program.<sup>8</sup> Its focus was again the poverty of small-scale farmers. While opportunities for off-farm jobs initially were urged by its planners for small farm survival, the final programs as passed emphasized still greater efforts by the agricultural establishment to create technically-superior farmers who would be less inclined to fail. The policy process quite simply could not produce a paradigm shift away from modernization/development.

Utopians, New Dealers, and Republicans of the first 60 years of the twentieth century, by all falling under its spell, proved the universal appeal of the agrarian myth. In the worst times of policy failure, all came back to their unbridled faith in helping even the worst economically-positioned farmers succeed. It was quite evident that, regardless of ideology, agricultural decisionmakers saw a common first principle in rural policy: keep people from falling into poverty and then rely on the natural resources of a rural environment to solve their problems. With Malthusian fears of food shortages and faith in the inherent worth of agrarian virtues, opinion leaders apparently could not envision until well after World War II that crop surpluses were chronic and farmers were in oversupply (Hathaway, 1963). The vestiges of the European



peasant experience, with its history of repressive and exploitive government involvement, were still too haunting for such thoughts to seem realistic in the nineteenth century or in the boom and bust days of the first half of the next.

#### **Structuring Rural Programs Under the Modernization/Development Paradigm**

An emphasis on agricultural development did not promote either prosperity for many communities or widespread economic diversification. Quite the contrary. While many rural regions suffered because their residents remained subsistence-oriented and had no farm products to trade, and so needed few services for reaching beyond the community, most still had at least some semblance of a farm presence that commanded and gained assistance. Some regions, where basic commodities were grown under price support guarantees, found greater prosperity, especially if yields were high, resulting in greater federal dollars flowing into the area. But even with this pattern of inequality in economic opportunity, government services did develop under this "farmers first" ethos to enrich the lives of most rural residents.

Responding to farm economic theorists such as Black (1929) who advocated serving more needs of the sector, land-grant physical scientists who argued that research reduced farm costs, and farm interest groups that chafed under persistent farm income problems, the Depression Era federal government of the 1930s established important programs beyond price supports. Credit, electrification, conservation, and regional development assistance were each provided through a new industrial policy logic. Farm incomes, it was argued, could be raised not by just the often undesirable practice of increasing farm prices, which often led to lost markets. The same income gains could be achieved by lowering the producer's costs of growing and getting things to market.

New programs were assigned either to new agencies of the U.S. Department

of Agriculture or to independent ones that would soon be incorporated within USDA. That federal department, like no other, burgeoned in size and in responsibilities throughout the 1930s as it promulgated new rules (Rasmussen and Baker, 1972: 30-44). In keeping with the emphasis on selective benefits, agencies within USDA were to think broadly about the needs of rural residents, as long as those needs fell under the existing expertise of the program specialists in each. Agency resources, in a version of farm trickle-down, then were targeted to users. The Farmers Home Administration, the Rural Electrification Administration, the Forest Service, the Farmers Cooperative Service, and the Soil Conservation Service each eventually identified and successfully cultivated a nonfarm clientele as secondary parts of their farm and plant resource service roles. For example, the Forest Service took on responsibilities for "assistance and advice to local development groups" to help them capitalize on economic opportunities associated with nearby national forests (Rasmussen and Baker, 1972:131). The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) became a lender of last resort to low-income rural residents, using low interest rates to provide single family housing. Like all New Deal farm programs, goals of the Resettlement Administration were kept alive, but shifted substantially as its successor, FmHA, evolved to become more pragmatic (Rasmussen, 1983).

The result, through federal intervention, was a gradual diversification of local economies that had once seen mostly farmers, suppliers, and marketers. But certainly this piecemeal attention was able to produce neither a general assessment of rural needs nor planned growth. Tourism developed as the principal industry in numerous regions where natural resources could be utilized to attract visitors. Construction firms, stabilized by FmHA building, became solvent and even prosperous employers. Automobile and truck retailers became a necessary

staple in each farm community. Manufacturing firms were recruited successfully to numerous rural communities by local political leaders who both pilfered plants from urban areas and sought outsourcing from larger firms whose main plants stayed in cities. Their recruitment was made possible not only because of federal rural electrification, but also through other federal and state initiatives to improve rural roads and bridges as well as other public utilities.

Reliance on federal policy, over time, became so great that once-unimaginable programs, such as those for water quality and sewage disposal, received support. Even rural water systems were constructed to replace inadequate wells and septic tanks in many areas. Grants-in-aid encouraged rural community dependency on federal largesse as a means of managing growth from the late 1960s and to the 1980s. As such, income transfer programs not only helped fully modernize U.S. agriculture; they also brought new jobs and professionalization of local government in much of rural America (Browne and Hadwiger, 1982; Seroka, 1986).

New programs and new beneficiaries, coupled with farming's continued displacement of producers, created changing rural communities and regions. By 1985-1986, only 514 of 2443 rural (non-metropolitan) counties were farm-dependent, places where at least 20 percent of total labor and proprietor income came from farming (Ahearn, Bentley, and Carlin, 1988). The great majority of these were west of the Mississippi River, where county population density was comparatively low. These relatively few farm-dependent counties were mostly in the Great Plains and Corn Belt, regions where larger-scale farms were most likely to have displaced the small (Carlin and Green, 1988). The non-metropolitan counties of the East, and to a lesser extent the Pacific Northwest, had become dependent--for at least 30 percent of total income--on manufacturing

(Bender and others, 1985). Unlike declining farm places, 40 percent of rural residents lived in manufacturing counties. Moreover, population losses in the 1980s were most heavy in farm-dependent counties; growth was more likely to occur in manufacturing-dependent rural places. Only rural retirement/recreation communities, often far beyond cities, grew more rapidly and with greater frequency.

These changes were intriguing for their results. In a prolonged era of "farmers first" rural policy, program benefits grew from farm agencies as they sought to serve other rural beneficiaries. Yet this change was misleading in both its procedural and in its substantive effect. It took place for only a select number of USDA agencies, operating only a small percentage of total farm programs. Indeed, some of these programs, such as tree planting for rural homesteads, were more of symbolic service than they were important to community development. Nonetheless, almost through serendipity, the rural economy shifted. The shift was so consequential that areas that continued to be farm-dependent did the least to balance community needs and retain population. Yet, from the 1960s through 1990, as both the number and the percentage of farm losses continued to decline, federal policy debates never shifted away from the emphasis on farm problems to encourage what appeared as the most positive employment and quality of life trends in rural America. Examining the content of policy discussions of that era helps explain why. Those discussions, as will be explained below, reflected the previous institutional capture of the rural policy agenda, a resulting lack of resolve in creating change, and too great a reliance on rural nostalgia and its myths.

#### **Getting Rural Policy Attention, 1960-1990**

As was true in the period 1909-1959, the contemporary era can be best

understood by looking at the recurring themes of policy discussions among those who made the decisions.<sup>9</sup> Four topics, all posed as questions, held center stage after 1960: How was the Department of Agriculture to exercise its jurisdictional responsibilities? What mechanisms were to be used in delivering rural development assistance? What was to be done with the persistent, often multi-generational, problems of rural poverty? Why was poverty to be dealt with as a part of rural policy? These four questions were not asked separately. Rather, they were wrapped together by public officials and addressed by them as parts of an interrelated, but unfamiliar dilemma facing those whose attentions had long been dominated by modernization/development and never by what was left behind. As a consequence, the four questions of policy were reduced to three questions of politics: Who controlled the turf? What could be agreed on with those in control? Was there anything left with which to serve the poor? This reductionism and alteration of the most relevant questions was not surprising in a special-constituency bureaucracy where original purposes were threatened by change (Robinson, 1991).

**Who was in charge?** Agriculture agencies led the way in providing the services necessary for both farm and rural community development. As noted, however, their resources were insufficient for the task. Over time several other federal cabinet level departments and other agencies assumed important rural service responsibilities, especially through grant disbursement. The Department of Commerce, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Department of Interior, the Department of Labor, and the Small Business Administration were all involved during the Eisenhower Administration. To clarify roles and provide nominal coordination, President Eisenhower through executive order created the Interagency Committee for Rural Development. It was ordered chaired by USDA.

While this committee has since changed several times, and added several new participants, the basic unit remained the same. Farm state legislators in Congress, along with USDA program administrators, insisted on strong agricultural leadership to avoid any erosion of control in designated rural programs with farm policy ties. The Cabinet Council Working Group on Rural Communities of the Reagan and Bush administrations was chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture and operated like its predecessors. While rural specialists assisted the Secretary, the central role of farming in rural problem solving has been understandably difficult to avoid. Even the inadequacies of rural databases, collected and analyzed as a USDA responsibility, presented problems since they paled in comparison to the large, complex agricultural database. Few in USDA found it palatable to scale back the collection of commodity and price statistics to pay for more knowledge about rural areas and nonfarm people. Nonetheless, things rural continued to be seen largely in the domain of USDA, despite whatever contrary expectations or complaints about inadequacies other policymakers raised. When comprehensive rural development proposals were brought to Congress, disagreements over jurisdiction always influenced legislation.

**Other service delivery obstacles.** Since the final year of the Eisenhower Administration, rural poverty has been noted as a specific problem with off-farm implications. Simply articulating its importance has made for political disruptions and, consequently, little policy relief. There have been no exceptions. In 1959, addressing poverty led to a proposal for creating new jobs as secondary income sources for small-scale farmers. But, action was dropped. Later, Democratic presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter each proposed rural policy initiatives having specific provisions for the disadvantaged. Yet, despite some successes in authorizing programs in Congress, meaningful funding

was never appropriated. Only with the slow evolutionary shift of farm agencies, such as FmHA, did nonfarm residents gain new programs under those administrations.

Republican efforts fared no better. Despite significant efforts to develop rural expertise and responsibilities in USDA, the Nixon Administration, and later that of President Ford, did little to mobilize new initiatives. Disagreements dominated legislative relations. Congress, as it had under Democratic presidents, made little effort to break policy log-jams caused by conflicts over how to administer, distribute funds to, and bring state and local governments into federal rural policy. So substantive goals over what to do for rural residents were largely unchanged when the Reagan Administration, avoiding any responsibility, dropped the rhetoric and proclaimed rural policy to be against the spirit of the newest "new federalism" and, thus, proper federal and free market principles (Osbourn, 1988b). Later, in 1990, when the Bush Administration resurrected rural problems and proposed a Rural Development Administration within USDA, it only reopened the quagmire. Influential legislators, in that instance, threatened to withhold funding for any new agency that would tie rural programs together and, in the process, break their farm policy linkage. Initial congressional action, as a result, allowed only planning--not an expenditure of funds or a permanent authorization for--a Rural Development Administration. Even the planning found continuing congressional resistance.

Despite differences in partisan emphasis, inaction was not caused by party politics or ideology. Rather, three kinds of disagreements were ubiquitous in disrupting policy initiatives for the rural disadvantaged. All were historically rooted in institutions, and none have been resolved. Consequently, their effect will remain indefinitely. The first disagreement was over whether old

institutions, such as the Farmers Home Administration, would lose influence through a change in ruling status. Long-time supporters did not wish to see that occur. The second disagreement was whether, in the face of scarce budget resources, programs for the disadvantaged would be funded at the expense of dollars previously allocated to the institutionalized clientele of farm programs. Farm state legislators and farm program administrators were adamant that they would not. Finally, disagreement long existed over who would deliver any new services that grew out of federal programs or reallocated dollars. While some advocated programs administered locally or in regions within states, supporters of such diverse organizations as the Rural Electrification Administration (which has a unique stake in rural development), the land-grant colleges, and the Extension Service argued instead for expanding their own historic responsibilities. Proponents of state funding of rural programs often agreed because of their linkages with these institutions. In all three kinds of disagreements, one common feature prevailed: roadblocks to decisionmaking came as long-time proponents sought to protect institutionalized rules or organizations that were essentially agricultural.

**When the poor did benefit.** Despite these procedural obstacles, the rural poor have at times in the past three decades made policy gains. However, their gains were not made through rural initiatives, even when the Department of Agriculture was responsible for new programs. Economic gains occurred in rural areas, as in urban ones, because poverty programs of the 1960s distributed new social service benefits (Daft, 1982; Deavers, Hoppe, and Ross, 1986). When, in the mid-1960s, the severe problems of rural hunger were identified through the efforts of Senate poverty subcommittee hearings, reforms did not provide unique or even fair solutions to the problems of the rural poor (Kotz, 1971; Berry,



1984). The poor were entitled equally by region, whether urban or rural, but the rural poor lacked equality because many rural counties refused to accept the programs. Also, there were few service providers who could, for example, distribute surplus foods. Corrective actions were slow and, especially in service capacity, never caught up. Enthusiasm was not present. Indeed, congressional agriculture committee members included hunger programs in subsequent farm bills primarily to gain the votes of urban, not rural, legislators (Barton, 1976a; Peters, 1978; Ferejohn, 1986). Including new constituents, in the face of a declining farm and rural population, was the primary way an increasingly urban Congress--operating under court ordered "one man-one vote" district principles of the 1960s--agreed to pass farm legislation (Browne, 1988b, 1989a). Other programs for the disadvantaged, for consumers, and more recently, for environmental quality later were added to farm bills of the 1970s and 1980s for this same purpose. Many of these served rural interests. But the addition of such programs did not mean that the shrinking number of farm state and farm district legislators suddenly agreed to place greater value on or give greater attention to how nonfarm policy problems affected rural America.

There were two important reasons why legislative priorities did not change. Policymakers, as shown by the content of their discussions, were far too embroiled in controversies that were protectionist in nature and set by the demands of an existing modernization/development paradigm. Moreover, that paradigm was kept in motion by the institutionalized maze of public and private organizations and extensive rules of an influential agricultural establishment that was, itself, farm-directed. Farm and rural policymakers traditionally depended on the judgment of its specialists for expertise and advice.

This brings forth the second reason to question the adequacy of attention

given to new rural programs: the intellectual framework long used in determining "first principles." Were policymakers, beset nationally and internationally by so many other nonagricultural and nonrural problems, able to re-examine critically the agrarian myth, the realities of industrialized agriculture, and the less virtuous, even inhospitable, circumstances of rural life? As the next sections will show, it seems that they have not. No incentives appear to have existed for curing the problems of quite limited information. The main obstacle to doing so was the structural organization of government with its generally decentralized rulemaking, or the basic nature of farm policymaking.

#### THE CONCENTRATED YET FRAGMENTED POLITICS OF FARM AND RURAL ISSUES

The agrarian myth prevailed as the key to understanding the problems of rural America because it provided such satisfying answers, at least in guiding political choices. Central myths, even ones that grow more false with time, have considerable value in holding together political and administrative units that otherwise lack common purpose. Myths with such value are obviously safeguarded. For the agrarian myth, with its message of the basic modernization/development needs of farm fundamentalism, political support has been long-term. Agricultural policy scholars, all disenchanted with the narrowness of political demands on behalf of farmers, decried the wrongful use of this myth for nearly six decades (Davis, 1935; Brewster, 1936; Griswold, 1948; Hathaway, 1963; Tweeten, 1987; Montmarquet, 1989). The question arises: How and why was it used? Furthermore, why did the myth fail to evolve, becoming less realistic and more a detriment to rural residents the more farming industrialized?

Each of the next three subsections, in part, will address those questions as they explain the creation and ensuing politics of a farm policy network. It

would be woefully inadequate to assume that the agrarian myth had a life of its own, one that found sustaining power independent of political need (or, for that matter, cultural need). It became mired in institutionalization. This section looks to the utility of the myth, especially given the structural problems of gaining institutionalization and then later representing farming and rural development within government. The initial two sections of the next part of the text on problems of rural policy governance will return briefly to use of the myth, both as cynical manipulation and as subconscious representation of an ideal. First, however, its purpose must be clarified.

The structural problems of representing farmers--and, by implication, other rural residents--were twofold. First, farmers, throughout the twentieth century, were a shrinking minority, and rural residents have long been outmigrants from their regions as well (Paar, 1966). Second, as explained in earlier sections of this chapter, representing the many policy facets of agriculture and rural affairs was complex. Simply to handle the plethora of programs and their select constituents, governing institutions had to change their rules to decentralize and specialize.

At the time same, however, there was concentration of institutions within farm policymaking, since the agricultural establishment, as it evolved, worked cooperatively. Yet coordination, as shall be explained, became difficult if not impossible. Governing units, within Congress and the administration, increasingly grew fragmented in their policy approaches as they offered selective benefits. Partisan influence was lost and shifted to policy networks, or, as some saw them, iron triangles. The networks eventually expanded to include both more policy issues and players. Coordination then proved even more difficult. Tending adequately to all problems was impossible. Without central direction or

goals, politics and programs meandered along as each new policy initiative or new problem was handled one at a time. Resorting to the unique features of agrarian imagery, either defensively to protect programs or offensively to explain why society should support something more for rural people, was one of the few means for keeping things at least marginally unified in the absence of planning.

### **The Evolution of a Farm Policy Network**

The politics of agriculture, despite the helping hand of agrarian beliefs, was never easy. There, as shall be outlined below, were great obstacles to farmers winning policy goals. Governing America was too complicated, either merely to give farmers what they wanted or to follow a mythic dream. Even the agricultural policy revolution of 1862, as noted earlier, was an anomaly made possible by the Civil War as much as it was a series of four sensible acts. Politics, nineteenth century style, was an amalgam of open- and closed-door conflicts. Open divisions were: regional within sprawling national boundaries, factionally bifurcated with shifts in control from one new party to another, ideological as ideals of new government structure took root in the realities of establishing a ruling state, and grassroots dependent as social movements and causes spawned civil discontent. Closed-door conflicts took place in the smoke-filled rooms of political folklore. Most especially, well-financed captains of industry self-interestedly pursued policies that would otherwise not be forthcoming when no stable majorities could be mustered to gain legislative ascent. Policy action took place, it most often seemed in that otherwise laissez-faire century, when either corruption or social crises created incentives for policymakers to act against the prevailing mood of doing little (Lowi, 1969:3-28; Morone, 1990). Under such conditions, strong political parties, imposing their discipline on members who bore their banner, were valued as among

the very few means of lending continuity of purpose to the governing process (Burnham, 1965, 1967; McCormick, 1986).

The entrepreneurial policymaker who served either himself or his constituents too well without partisan endorsement was fettered severely. U.S. agriculture, despite the large numbers of farmers in the country, was not easily provided for under a strong party government. There was no unified voice. In part the problem was regional, with Republicans dominating a post-Civil War North while Democrats after post-Civil War reconstruction, ruled the South. Northern crops and southern crops, distinctly different in both types and the means of production, had their own partisan allies in national politics. There was no lasting farmers' party.

Another part of the farmers' problem with unresponsive parties was with the personal attachments of agrarians. Farmers were well-organized, but in very locally-oriented groups. States counted their farm organizations by the hundreds. These locals, without national linkage, were ripe for short-term forays into social movement protest, third party electoral ventures, and assorted revolts against such leading industries as the railroads (Buck, 1913; Saloutos and Hicks, 1951; McConnell, 1953, 1966; Shideler, 1957; Saloutos, 1960; Salisbury, 1969; Weinstein, 1970). They could effectively mobilize support for the agricultural establishment as they did in 1889 when, against considerable opposition, USDA gained cabinet status. The net effect of their disruptive ways was that farmers were not compelling partners to be invited willingly into decisionmaking by those who controlled the parties and, therefore, the flow of Washington's political debates. They, God willing as the politicians saw it, were left to be served by their own nationally dispersed agrarian institutions, ones put in place at significant costs to keep farmers educated, civil, and as

quiet as possible.

It was in this context of partisan disadvantage and the political inadequacy of existing institutions that the farm bloc emerged in 1921, nearly simultaneously with the crash of farm prices and land values. Although its formal organization lasted just months, cooperation among farm state legislators persisted long afterward through an informal voting bloc. Its rise radically transformed farm representation as a first move toward concentrated attention to constituent interests (Capper, 1922; Kile, 1948; Tweeten, 1979; Hansen, 1987a, 1991). Still not invited to share in political influence and financially plagued, farmers under the farm bloc forced their way--and the way of the agricultural establishment in Washington--to prominence. They fostered changes in the rules for maintaining the agricultural establishment, moving it from an emphasis only on modernization/development through policy-induced technology to include also an emphasis on sustaining political influence to protect that policy paradigm. It was hard for an elected politician to survive among farm voters when subjected to partisan decrees that were not in conformity to these values (Hansen, 1991).

The farm bloc, as a loosely organized but still formalized body of legislators, began first as a Senate coalition called together in the Washington offices of the Farm Bureau. It then moved to the House of Representatives. Led by an Iowa member in each house, with strongest representation in the Senate, the organization won its only legislative battle by fighting the party leaders of most bloc members. The Republican leadership had planned to adjourn Senate deliberations and later move on to a tariff bill. Doing so, however, would have left untended what farm bloc legislators of both parties saw as several important pieces of agricultural legislation.

As priorities, those bills were of little national consequence in party debates. On the tariff question, in contrast, Democrats clearly "lost money on duties while Republicans gained" (Hansen, 1990:548). But farmers and farm lobbyists were alone, yet on common ground, in seeing issues of credit and the regulation of agribusinesses as critical ones. Agriculture was unique from the rest of society in that, during modernization/development and industrialization, unfavorable terms of trade had caused the agricultural sector to lag inevitably behind non-agricultural sectors (Anderson, 1987). Accordingly, farmers, whether Democrats or Republicans, found their welfare falling behind the rest of society. The farm bloc won by resisting partisan initiatives in favor of common constituent problems, halting Senate adjournment, and getting leadership support for half of the pending bills. Aiding recalcitrant legislators, the Farm Bureau mobilized its locals and created a wave of home district constituent contacts with numerous other congressional members. In doing so, the farm bloc demonstrated with force a new political principle. Namely, they showed that legislators and lobbyists could pass legislation for a special segment of society by working cooperatively to blunt the opposition of party control. It became for agriculture a new procedural rule. The strength of the new rule was in the agreements that--jointly--elected and private farm representatives were able to force to a majority vote on the floor of Congress. It was because of that change that elements of Congress and farm interests were joined inseparably to the existing agricultural establishment, especially in support of price intervention.

The farm bloc's importance, apart from the legislation it passed, was as a successful model for an emerging network of farm policy activists, one held together by an ongoing relationship dependent on recurring issues (Salisbury et al, 1987; Browne, 1990; Hansen, 1991). From this initial cooperation came a

close working relationship--first, between private sector supporters of the agricultural establishment and legislators who depended on farm votes. Because development of both an industrialized agriculture and an administrative state vehicle for facilitating sector change had led to great dependency on USDA expertise, it soon became necessary for agriculture officials to function as part of the network (Barton, 1976b; Skocpol and Finegold, 1982; Hamilton, 1990). The ties that well-organized USDA employees had to farmers helped facilitate involvement. So elements of an established statim, as represented through bureaucracy, coalesced with those of grassroots democracy to form a Washington-based policy apparatus. That apparatus would soon gain its own institutional status as a common forum for rulemaking, one that expected to hang together. The fact that USDA was a highly professional organization of well-trained appointees as well as relatively well-funded in its scientific work increased the department's political importance to and involvement with the emerging network. Most federal agencies of the era, other than USDA, had developed under twin disadvantages: (1) unskilled patronage appointees who were chosen because of loyalty to political party leaders rather than for their professional talents and (2) mediocre budgets (Dupree, 1957; White, 1958). But this was not a problem for agriculture, given the scientific and political peacekeeping work expected of its establishment.

The tripartite network of lobbyists, legislators, and bureaucrats, as described above, owed its existence in agriculture, as in other policy areas, to several problems of governance. First among them was the problem of passing policy specifically for an economic clientele in a laissez-faire government where the market generally was expected to provide for basic human needs. Second, unlike business leaders who often bought political favors when the market did not



meet their needs, farmers lacked the prosperity and high incomes to do so.

Finally, there existed three related institutional problems to claiming power under principles of majority rule. Majoritarianism, unless accompanied by considerable amounts of mutual support across different issue areas (mobilizing several sets of minorities in a log-roll) of government, meant that programs benefiting directly only a few, for all practical purposes, were usually impossible to pursue. Crises were valued by policymakers because their severity made it evident to the greater public why a single sector should be served. Without a crisis triggering attention to a problem, farm policymakers and others representing select clientele lacked mobilizing influence. In a strictly constitutional sense, legislators without sufficient votes had no power to pass bills, lobbyists found little power in memberships that were irrelevant to most legislators, and USDA officials had no ready market within the administration to sell presidents even the best new policy ideas. Unless tied to one another across institutional boundaries, all three -- legislators, lobbyists, and administrators -- were isolated as mere extensions of farming.

Linking themselves together, of course, meant rejecting political centralization from outside agriculture and, of course, attempting to win narrow policy gains (Hardin, 1978). Networks sought to be resistant from party control, presidential leadership, and administrative coordination and central planning. They also resisted coalition-building among all but the most like-minded interest groups. Washington-based farm groups of the 1920s that favored union tactics, cooperative ventures, and radical populist proposals did not participate with the farm bloc, nor did they get its attention. They were unrepresentative of the institutions that fueled the sharing of political power. Accordingly, they were not included. Looming policy differences could not be resolved in networks that

lacked formal rules for arbitration. Participants had to be comfortable enough with one another to ensure voluntary cooperation in the face of the attacks they took for their common dissent against centralization. The effect was that network politics, despite its concentration, still left the agricultural community as a whole fragmented in its policy representation. Some were left out. But fragmentation among active participants cut two other ways: first, not all farm advocates worked together and, second, those who cooperated across organizational lines still had to worry about the unique problems of their own rules. Life in Congress, for example, was quite different in expectations from life in USDA or the Farm Bureau.

Nonetheless, policy networks did produce results through favorable legislation. In a sense, these were quite natural institutions--"a free private enterprise---which administered itself"(Schattschneider, 1935:31). The prevailing central tendency within federal government by the late 1920s was for those who could work cozily together to do so. Not surprisingly, policy networks made possible the previously discussed, major shift from collective to selectively-received benefits. Cooperative decisionmaking across government branches or the public/private sector divide took place routinely among those who shared common policy ideas and goals. And, of course, mythology about their importance developed. Political scientists roundly criticized such three-partner "iron triangles" (see Figure 2) for evading majoritarian review, avoiding democratic principles, and producing very narrow public policy (Griffith, 1939; Schattschneider, 1960; Freeman, 1965; Davidson, 1977). Citizen, as opposed to clientele, preferences seemed to play little role in determining policy. Rather, administrators provided the policy rationale and justification, lobbyists mobilized grassroots support among potential recipients and worked the Congress,

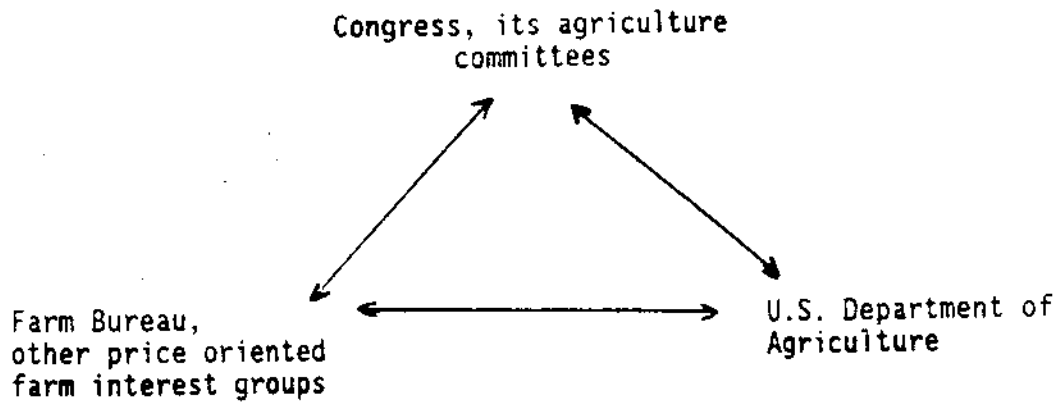
and Congress though its decentralized committee system designed programs and gained acquiescence on floor votes. Legislation passed because, to some extent, network momentum was hard to break. More importantly, however, congressional committees got their way as one reciprocated with another to log-roll with those from other policy networks for final legislative passage. Agriculture, because of its strong grassroots ties and associative state establishment, gained a reputation as the epitome of the U.S. policy network (Talbot and Hadwiger, 1968; Lowi, 1969; Ripley and Franklin, 1991).

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Farmers, it seemed, got just what they wanted (Lowi, 1964a, 1964b.; Meyer and Dishman, 1983). But, of course, there was great illusion in that observation. Institutionalization in rulemaking did not translate to omnipotence. Neither farmers nor anyone else in agriculture got all they wanted from public policy (Hansen, 1987b). Many needs were left unmet, many proposals unpassed. In part, that was because those who shared the network often disagreed among themselves on very fundamental issues, which stymied most such ideas. Policy networks also were never as free as critics envisioned. At its essence, network politics was still plagued by external conflict. Policy areas competed with one another for attention and funding. Reciprocity and trade-offs could never at one point in time satisfy all policy claimants or mute all disagreements (Berry, 1989b). Presidents wanted to regain control of agendas, and, for debates over price policy, they did under Eisenhower and Kennedy (Hansen, 1991). Administration officials reasserted authority over agencies as well (Hansen, 1989). Also, the networks could not exclude those who legitimately made credible demands on whatever policy was under discussion among regular participants (Heclo, 1978; Gais, Peterson, and Walker, 1984; Walker, 1991). New ideas, as

Figure 2

The Interactive Farm/Rural Policy Network,  
1920s and 30s



shown in section one, forced their way into traditional programs. In response, traditional network participants, including those in agriculture, restricted their political demands to the programs they desired most or felt most likely to be obtainable (McConnell, 1966; Rose, 1967; Barton, 1976b; Hadwiger, 1976; Browne, 1988b, 1990, 1991). Agriculture policy experts expressed wonder that even those could be kept alive faced with declining farm numbers (Cochran, 1958; Hathaway, 1963, 1969).

Network politics, with both these strengths and weaknesses for its participants, had disastrous consequences for rural policy, especially for meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. Only a core of programs, ones of the heartland shared by nearly all institutional parts, could be accorded fully protected status (Downs, 1966). Yet, under conditions of network governance, with the capture of rural issues by an agricultural establishment that assumed jurisdiction, only farm policy specialists exercised the potential to get rural issues to the forefront of the nation's political agenda. Presidential commissions and complaints could only raise, and not pursue, the issues. Paradoxically, in much the same way that the modernization paradox (growing more than increases in consumption would absorb) trapped farmers, farm policy specialists could never realize their network's full potential, or produce every program they might want.

If either private or public sector experts seriously championed new rural issues, they would have exhausted the political capital and goodwill needed to support their most valued programs. Of course, they avoided such risk. The result, because of this structural-institutional flaw, meant that the agricultural policy network always gave weak support to, but then backed away from, the problems of rural poverty. Moreover, the network's participants found

it extraordinarily difficult to move away even nominally from the modernization/development paradigm and the rhetoric of serving agrarianism as a unique American feature (Paarlberg, 1980:5-13.). Doing so would only have allowed those in central authority or within competing networks to challenge more effectively the efficacy of a national farm policy. Admitting to institutional flaws would have brought greater policy losses, or the even more feared reassertion of central control. Resurrecting agrarian mythology in the face of each contest, however, produced the opposite result: fewer losses and continued institutional autonomy. Because the farm policy network was composed of fragile political relationships, not of iron, it needed strong justification and beliefs to hold it together.

#### **How and Why Contemporary Rural Issues Got Lost**

The legacy of policy network politics and the difficulties of maintaining influence persists into the present, owing directly to the past. A still declining farm population and increased competition for less available budget appropriations only makes the paradox of the policy network more severe in the 1990s. Farm policy advocates hang on much harder, as they did throughout the 1980s, to what policy benefits they still have. And, since 1977, they preached the agrarian doctrine of farm fundamentalism with the same old fire, or they hid behind the firebrands of farm protest who did (Browne and Lundgren, 1987). Therefore, rural policy proposals tend to be placed aside, as always, as costly threats. New budget rules have been added that, to make matters more difficult, require a new program to be paid for by savings from an old one (Sinclair, 1991).

Nonetheless, because some rural problems have gained policy attention while others have not, there are other, very contemporary structural features of government that also must be seen as responsible for the specific neglect of the

rural poor and disadvantaged today. Two such features stand out. First, the institutional basis of the agricultural establishment has literally exploded in internal conflict over economic interest, bringing far greater scrutiny and risk-avoiding behavior to the process of rulemaking (Bonnen, 1973, 1980, 1984, 1988; Browne, 1988a). Second, the few extant rural institutions, as rooted in farm programs, are the ones perceived widely as quite significant; they control their parts of the policymaking agenda and squeeze out alternative rural policy ideas.

**Explosion.** While the agricultural policy network maintained its farm focus throughout the 1970s and 1980s, many new authoritative participants were established within it. Policy, in response, was ever accommodating. In addition to USDA and other departments long coordinated through the Cabinet Council Working Group on Rural Communities, there were federal agencies that chose to compete more than they were willing to cooperate with USDA. They gained their own pieces of what is thought of still as agricultural policy. In U.S. domestic policy, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) fought for such issues as ground water authority while the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) took on numerous responsibilities for food quality and safety. Agricultural trade issues, once solely a USDA prerogative, were shared increasingly with the Department of Commerce and the White House Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. This meant, as a result, that USDA energies turned largely to protecting long-standing programs that agricultural clients valued the most. To protect them and the foundation of clientele support, USDA agencies--with congressional support--also established programs that worked more closely with consumers, food recipients, environmentalists, agribusinesses, and other nonfarmers.

Clientele relationships were threatened as well by the increased prominence

federal officials placed on nonprogrammatic government initiatives. Macroeconomic problems and the implications of massive U.S. budget and trade deficits were acknowledged by many to be more important to farm incomes than price policy. The Council of Economic Advisors, Office of Management and Budget, State Department, and Federal Reserve Board each placed constraints on what USDA agencies could do. The place of farm price policy and international trade, as a result, became even more dominant topics of discussion in agriculture.

The combined result of department and agency competition on these high-salience questions of farming and trade policy moved rural policy discussions further to the administrative background. Issues of the institutional heartland had primacy. Little time or money was allocated for changing policy directions that were ignored so consistently for decades.

The effect was no different in Congress, even though institutional changes and the reasons for them varied considerably from those within the administration. After all, except for some planning and analysis, agencies and programs responded largely to congressional dictates. Congress began operating under the reforms of 1970-76 that, especially for the House of Representatives, weakened committee claims and further dispersed rights to the proliferating subcommittees within the committees. Seniority of members declined in importance, and democratic participation in committee assignments and operations increased. Policy jurisdictions of the subcommittees became more specialized, even aiming primarily at narrow goals when two or more units worked on parts of the same bill (Oppenheimer, 1980; Ornstein, 1981).

During the years following reform of procedural rules, agricultural legislation continued to move further, but more quickly, in the direction of incorporating diverse clientele into new programs. This was especially true of



what, especially after 1964, were recurring omnibus farm bills where most farm and rural programs were authorized together and where traditional programs were grouped for protection. What began as vote trading in 1964 wheat legislation gradually encompassed the adoption of numerous farm bill provisions for those new clients assigned to USDA (Hadwiger and Talbot, 1965; Talbot and Hadwiger, 1968; Barton, 1976a, 1976b; Paarlberg, 1980; Browne, 1988b, 1989a; Moyer and Josling, 1990). Members with nonfarm and nonrural constituents responded most enthusiastically in support of agricultural legislation when deft agriculture committee chairs, despite weakened powers, managed to get the eight House and seven Senate subcommittees to report out proposals for a growing diversity of constituents (Peters, 1978, 1983).

This shift in attention is played out as a way for more legislators to see district and state reasons to vote for production agriculture. It remains not simply a way to show more policy relevance. So, to win votes, things such as urban programs, consumer concerns, and environmental issues are addressed. But, despite doing so, it is too politically tumultuous to make gains in farm programs in Congress (Hadwiger, 1982; Bosso, 1987; Browne, 1988b, 1988c; Reichelderfer and Hinkle, 1989; Maney, 1991). Administrative progress within what are essentially farm organizations with farm-induced rules is even harder. However, and in large part because of these difficulties, rural problems are not addressed as priorities. Given the historical linkage between farm and rural issues, the likelihood is that no new votes will be gained on the floor. Rural residents and farmers still are seen as residing in the same locales, represented by the same legislators, and benefiting jointly through whatever agricultural stability can be induced. As a consequence, no serious attention has been given to rethinking the much-defended agricultural modernization/development paradigm, at least into

the early 1990s (Browne, 1988b; Bonnen and Browne 1989). Thus, the explosion of attention given to new issues, as well as the active involvement of more members of Congress, serves also to drive rural issues further to the legislative background.

**Turf protection.** One final structural element creates problems in reforming policy on behalf of the rural disadvantaged. Change that sets new policy directions is inconsistent with existing institutional arrangements, threatening some rural programs and organizations. The problem is most evident in Congress where the agriculture committees hold rulemaking jurisdiction over rural initiatives, especially and most clearly ones with a development focus. The agriculture committees, despite little policy progress in defining a distinct rural interest, have little choice but to insist on retaining that jurisdiction for themselves and for the Department of Agriculture. In administration affairs, for example, legislators ensure that USDA controls as best it can interdepartment arrangements in coordinating rural policies.

Rural problems, however, actually are addressed by numerous pieces of legislation whose authorizing committees are not the House Agriculture Committee and the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. This is especially true in the House of Representatives. The Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce, Interior and Insular Affairs, and Public Works and Transportation committees of the House all overlap with the Agriculture Committee in much of their subcommittee responsibilities. Since committee chairs are empowered to request concurrent or sequential referral from the leadership when jurisdictional questions come up, the potential for conflict is high. Committees or their members routinely have goals of their own, most frequently set by desires to service different constituents under varying delivery systems.

While the House Agriculture Committee rarely has called for shared jurisdiction on bills, others have. The result is two-fold. Agriculture members seldom force rural initiatives on others. For example, education and economic development programs initiated in other committee usually have been ignored by the Agriculture Committee. Moreover, the Agriculture Committee also has avoided offering comprehensive rural policy proposals that would have brought conflict, and shared planning responsibilities, with other committees. The danger to the committee is that, with deadlock between committees, rural policy responsibilities will be lost in any floor vote.

Turf battles are institutional in ways other than determining who decides. Long-standing rural institutions with important rulemaking authority are also protected regularly and, in the process, create roadblocks to policy change. A few have become nearly sacrosanct. The role of the Farmers Home Administration in adequately meeting the needs of low-income residents has never been challenged without a major response from Congress and the agency. New tasks, such as telecommunications, have been devised and held out to supplement the work of the Rural Electrification Administration. Land-grant university advocates generally block any allocation of rural research or extension funding elsewhere. To a great extent, support is generated because, unless these institutions are protected, no others exist as either knowledgeable planning agents or service delivery mechanisms for rural America.

The implications of such protectiveness of the few existing rural institutions are important and quite negative. They also are probably unavoidable. The structural support for rural problems has developed as so pervasively weak, both within the Congress and within the other organizations of the agricultural establishment, that policy reform is precluded under the present

rules of governance. While a policy network exists to maintain an ever-broadening agenda of agriculture and rural issues, that network is bound to be ineffective for but a few issues and a few possible clients. The most traditional institutions within it are able to be protected, somewhat. The most publicly prominent of new rulemaking authorities even make some gains. But, with pressures from those two strongly-supported sources, many other problems are left to go largely ignored. Under such conditions, as will be discussed in the next part, the very mechanisms for bringing forth alternative public policy claims and refuting conventional, mythic wisdom about such things as rural America are still largely absent. The policy process and its gatekeepers cannot put systematic re-examination of farm and rural programs on the rulemaking agenda unless an extraordinary level of support exists for doing so. It does not. Thus, for reasons of public policy evolution and institutionalization, re-examination of rural needs fails to occur.

## NOTES (1)

1. This analysis was prepared under a grant from the Ford Foundation and the Rural Economic Policy Program of the Aspen Institute. In addition to the grant from the Ford Foundation, financial support was provided by the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture for preliminary work on the project as well as for data analysis. The National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy, Resources for the Future also assisted by providing office and clerical assistance in Washington, D.C., through its visiting fellows program. Central Michigan University contributed through its Research Professors program and The Institute for Social and Behavioral Studies, both of which provided released time. The Everett McKinley Dirksen Congressional Leadership Research Center also provided support.
2. This section, and to an extent the next two, rely on earlier work done with two colleagues who are interested in the problems of policy reform. See Bonnen and Browne (1989) and Browne and Reid (1990).
3. This material is extracted from a research project conducted in 1985-6 that focused on 238 lobbyist interviews throughout the agricultural and rural policy arena (Browne, 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Browne and Cigler, 1990; Browne and Lundgren, 1987).
4. Information for this section comes from a recent project on Congress that followed from the interest group research cited in footnote two. The section relies most extensively on interviews with legislators and staff in 113 House of Representatives and Senate offices. Several other staff and Washington policy participants involved with rural policy provided background information. The Ford Foundation and other organizations cited

in footnote one supported that research. Some of the rationale for that project can be seen in Browne (1991).

5. I mean only that agrarian ideology prevailed. As several decades of historical analysis shows, there was no farsighted plan nor even policy consensus over the creation of organizations and rules for U.S. agriculture. There, however, was incremental growth and change as policy decisions led to largely compatible institutions (Benedict, 1942, 1950; Kirkendall, 1966; Perkins, 1969).
6. Sandra S. Osbourn's (1988a, 1988b) thorough review of rural policy for the Congressional Research Service made writing this section easy.
7. Since 1935-1939, the average number of U.S. farms lost has been 88,118 or almost 1.3 percent of the peak number per annum. From 1945-1950, 63,800 farms were lost per year. From 1950-1960, 168,500 losses per year occurred, or 29.8 percent of all those in operation at the beginning of the decade. Since then the numbers are: 1960-70, 101,400 per year, 25.6 percent loss; 1970-80, 51,600 per year, 17.5 percent loss; 1980-90, 29,600 per year, 12.1 percent loss (Economic Research Service, 1986 and updated).
8. The Rural Development Program of 1959 did not create new programs. It coordinated existing programs in an attempt to aid a specific group of beneficiaries, low-income farmers.
9. The Rural Development Act of 1972, signed amidst disagreements within Congress and between the Congress and President Nixon, and the Rural Development Policy Act of 1980 were the only two comprehensive rural reform bills passed during this period. Despite President Johnson's often expressed interest, rural program coordination and a "farmers first" emphasis on programs dominated the policy changes made between 1963 and 1969.

## THE PROBLEMS OF GOVERNING IN A MODERN ERA

### THE IMPOSSIBLE TASK OF RURAL ADVOCACY

The first part of this analysis outlined the development of the key institutional constraints that even now hinder efforts to help the rural poor. In summary, those in rural poverty have been crowded out from a national public policy approach that never offered them a place. Rural communities are little better off.

Historically there have been numerous factors that explained why. Some are the encompassing trends. To begin with, the early development of U.S. agriculture and its institutions dominated the rural scene. Public policy was directed to the farm sector, not rural communities and regions. The intensity of interest in farm policy was understandable since the sector was in periodic crises due to its inability to control chronic commodity surpluses with resulting severe losses to farmers.

Other factors, though, are ones owing to the dynamics of political choice. The question of policy choices about whom to serve--those staying in farming or those exiting--was never open to question. It was always the former, never the latter. The emergence of agrarian institutions with ties to the farm, at the political grassroots, stretching to Washington, to within the public organizations of the agricultural establishment, and in Congress forestalled that question being posed. The reasons why are not hard to explain: first, policy developed in a laissez-faire century that was unsupportive of any government intervention and, second, even as government evolved to be more interventionist, it always remained difficult under majority rules even to pass farm policy.

Those favorable rules that were passed were jealously safeguarded. There, as a consequence, was little in the way of time, inclination, popular support, or political capital to divert to other rural problems. The policy network and those who composed its parts never saw sufficient reasons to break with the paradigm of agricultural modernization/development. That paradigm was too rooted in the persuasive agrarian myth of helping hardworking farmers survive and the nation prosper. It provided a good set of first principles for uniting agricultural supporters, for keeping old programs alive, and for passing compatible new ones (see also Browne et al, 1992).

Could prior institutionalization still control the logic of rural policy and account for its continued neglect in a modern era? The answer, this next part of the text will explain, is that it has and continues to do so. What happened to both rural regions and federal rural policy, as the first section of this chapter will show, made policy advocacy extremely difficult. Advocating effectively for the rural poor in national politics became as near to impossible as things could be. Little, not just narrow or particularistic, best describes rural policy. History left the rural poor, indeed rural communities, with critical policymaking problems: little grassroots political base for national mobilization, little interest representation in Washington, and little in the way of useful integrating institutions or federal-level political targets. The few existing institutions protect very little. They, in any effective way, demand from the polity even less. Often rural institutions are lost in the noise of other rural advocacy voices. Such is the fate of representing a place as opposed to an economic sector--especially when, upon examination, that place proves to be an extraordinarily diverse one where relatively few people live, often in great distance from one another.



## Near Death at the Grassroots

Rural interests, especially those representing the poor, are in an inherently weak position for mounting an effective lobbying strategy for dealing with national public policy. Advocacy has long rested on a base of political support or resources. Without them, an organized interest gains no listeners. Political scientists have over the years shown that resources of interest groups could take an endless diversity of forms, ranging from superior strategy to money (Truman, 1951). However, the tacit and often demonstrated assumption has been that membership was the key resource. Members provided the stuff of other resources by contributing. Time, a voting bloc, an angry crowd, letters to policymakers, financial contributions, and political credibility were each said to emanate from strong memberships.

But a countervailing trend has surfaced to membership dependency as well, one that could greatly have assisted rural policy even though rural residents failed to join groups that formed for specifically rural purposes. That trend has seen patrons, or private and public sponsors, emerge as a catalyst for the organization of many interest groups. Berry (1989a) called the quintupling in the number of interest groups in the U.S. between 1920 and 1980 an explosion into an "interest-group society", in which political activism was as expected as any other personal service. Nearly 40 percent of all national lobbies were founded after 1960 (Walker, 1983, 1991). To a great extent, growth in numbers of groups paced the growth in numbers of issues before government (Salisbury et al, 1987). Given the narrowing of particularistic programs throughout government--not just in agriculture--and widespread charges that Congress micromanaged society and the economy, neither increase was surprising (Birnbaum and Murray, 1987; Foreman, 1988). What did surprise many political scientists, however, was the

proliferation of groups without, or with very few, members (Berry, 1977; Walker, 1983, 1991; Salisbury, 1984). Patrons--as modern day "sugar daddies" for political causes--contributed money, helped organize, refined the resources, and otherwise mobilized the support of those in society who would stand with but otherwise not be joiners of interest groups. Many patrons were from outside the policy arena they wished to influence. The largesse of foundations, churches, businesses, and other private organizations provided advocates for issues and positions that membership groups ignored (McCarthy and Zald, 1973; Walker, 1983).<sup>1</sup> Sometimes federal funds, especially through poverty and social service programs, played the patron's role. These programs provided organizers, facilities, common meeting grounds, and causes around which to plan collective action in unison with likeminded groups from elsewhere in the nation. These new groups provided policy advocacy under the guise of either public education or facilitating citizen participation in the implementation of government programs.

Nonetheless, whether it be through membership or patronage support, interest groups matter a great deal in a society that accepts their active involvement as a given. While the media, congressional staff, bureaucrats, and others were able to identify and raise issues, it was interest groups that kept issues alive in the slow process of policymaking by developing an intense and stable concern for recurring problems. Given the obstacles to government creating programs that no constituents acknowledged that they wanted or needed, organized interests served as the critical vehicle for getting issues back continually to the bargaining table in Washington (Browne, 1990, 1991; Evans, 1991). Patronage as well as membership-based groups both were able to keep issues alive by alluding to if not being organized by a designated constituency as worthwhile beneficiary.

The problem for rural policy has been that, as a set of issues, it really lacks any constituency, either to organize itself or for patrons to rally (Nagel, 1990). From the perspective of resources needed to carry issues forward, nonfarm rural interest groups have few members and few financial supporters. Nor is there any compelling reason to think that, with agriculture's decline, there exists a potential base for more than expanding marginally either of the two. Rather, there are three reasons to believe that rural advocacy had and continues to have little chance of spreading: over time few rural institutions were left on which to build, there never were many incentives on which to create or sustain effective rural groups, and non-rural groups seldom represented rural issues with diligence. All of these create internal obstacles to organizing. They combined with a fourth and external factor, the removal of publicly funded federal programs for community organizing, or patronage, in the 1980s. Each factor, but especially the internal ones, was linked to patterns of national policymaking and the greater institutional status of farm America.<sup>2</sup>

First, institutions have long supported the local polity and its policies just as they have national ones. Moreover, these were always linked historically for much of the rural U.S. Rural communities and regions, however, lost their politically relevant local institutional base (Bonnen, 1990).

Certainly, rural churches, chambers of commerce, service clubs and school associations continue to exist as institutions for social interaction within communities. But they always were far from comparable in their collective action to the plethora of nineteenth century farm groups that gave an encompassing structure to community-based rural life. Nor were they ever like the once strong Farm Bureau, or even the National Farmers Union or the Grange, with strong county and regional units that maintained well-integrated voices in Washington. The

general farm groups, especially, were vital, in that they also brought forward support, and gained memberships, from the ranks of downtown rural merchants and professionals.

With the decline of farming as a pervasive way of life and a dominant economic force in most rural communities, both local community structure and national linkages also declined. Towns in Iowa and Nebraska, as farming provided less, found themselves with the same kinds of hidden rural problems that once characterized isolated extractive industry communities in Appalachia, the northern "cutover" regions of the Great Lakes, and the Rocky Mountains (Jacobsen and Albertson, 1986; Davidson, 1990). These places were hidden from the national public and from public policy debates because no one was there locally to articulate beyond the community a clear set of value-laden reasons--like the agrarian myth--for paying them national attention. The same was always true for most of the rest of nonfarm America, where no national preoccupation emerged--or was allowed to form--for understanding and supporting the unique and vital contribution of miners, fishers, or mill-workers (Gaventa, 1980). The understanding of rural places in general was the mythical one of their qualities of pastoral simplicity, rather than a conviction as to why they needed national policy attention or support.

In consequence, existing local institutions, in farm and nonfarm communities alike, offered diminished prospects for modern grassroots rural advocacy that could pressure for a national public policy. Those that survived had an inward focus, one directed almost exclusively to the immediate service work of helping neighbors and renewing community solidarity. They hardly could be expected to engage effectively in rebuilding national institutional linkages when these were never their own responsibilities in the first place.

A second reason for a lack of member and patron support for rural advocacy groups has been linked with the reasons for joining with others and becoming active politically. There were and are no incentives. While local organizations lacked the capacity to create national values on behalf of severe rural needs, those who represented them conceivably could have joined together to work for some policy gains. There were problems, however, not the least of which was determining what actually concerned rural residents and their potential patrons relative to the possibilities for national policy.

Rural regions and communities have long been so diverse that any attempt to rally support across geographical boundaries for general rural needs, or even the plight of the most disadvantaged, lacked cohesion. Those who lived there or identified with things rural had a scanty common relationship, which in turn impeded social action. Social movement theorists argued persuasively that previously unclustered or nonaggregated customers existed for movement-style advocacy; but these people had to be exhorted to act in unison through the use of a powerful common message or threat that conveyed very specific meaning (Wilson, 1973; Tilly, 1978; Zald and McCarthy, 1987; Salisbury, 1989). This, for nonfarm rural America, never existed.

The rural disadvantaged and the rural community, as two general sets of the needy, were by-passed for institutional consideration and inclusion through a lack of a relevant unifying message. Where large-scale social movements of the disadvantaged succeeded, the setting and the emphasis both were urban (Kotz and Kotz, 1977; Piven and Cloward, 1977). But when the setting was designated as rural, the emphasis was specific to a particularistic need--rural hunger and migrant workers in particular (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). Even farmers, imitating previous generations of agrarians, galvanized a movement-style politics

with success in the late 1970s and 1980s (Browne, 1983; Cigler and Hansen, 1983; Browne and Lundgren, 1987). But, like the hungry and the migrant workers, protesting farmers played on the irony--not the expectation--that pathos could be found in the idyllic hinterland. And they accordingly emphasized farm policy not rural policy reform. Much the same happened in rural, nonfarm communities of the southern U.S., where local citizen groups were likely to organize only by galvanizing against such common and traditional enemies as mine operators, industries that would despoil the environment, and seats of local power (Gaventa, 1980). Their efforts, however, remained local, touching only the environmental movement on a larger scale. Rural imagery, no matter the conditions, has proven unamenable to inspiring the social advocacy fostered by cities for national policy support.

Joining specific groups, as opposed to movements, has been discouraged similarly by a lack of incentives. In that regard, rural groups followed a general pattern. Organized interests found stable memberships when they offered selective rewards, or those that accrued only to supporters. Otherwise they were plagued by free riders. For some groups, the free-rider problem meant offering rewards to members that had little to do with public policy advocacy work: insurance programs, special services, personal political gains, grant assistance, and the like (Olson, 1965; Salisbury, 1969). For others, public policy did matter (Moe, 1980 and numerous other research studies). But members were more likely to support public policy ventures when they saw personal rewards as imminent (Olson, 1965; Robinson, 1991: 21-22). Patrons, in the same vein, hesitated to back losers, or causes that might not organize effectively (Berry, 1977). Groups that gained stable support from a select membership or a highly focused patron, even the federal government, were most likely to be organized

around programs that distributed selective benefits to members or to a social unit or type favored by the patron. For that reason, prior to program cuts, federal funds were one of the few mobilizing devices in rural America for bringing the poor together, even if it was to rally around specific program needs.

Rural groups, as can be assumed from the above, have long faced problems on several fronts in mobilizing a national lobbying effort (Browne, 1988). How can an entrepreneur organize a group that offers sufficient nonpolicy rewards to create a rural constituency? Are there even such rewards? How, in the face of rural policy neglect, can future policy rewards be held out as probable? Moreover, given the vast differences among rural communities, how can selective rewards be structured for potential members?

The answers to those questions were never satisfactory ones for potential rural interests. That was most evident in the way the handful of contemporary rural interest groups coped. Groups that purported to be involved publicly in the general interests of the disadvantaged, such as Rural America and the Rural Coalition, have been so strapped for resources that, in times when policy opportunities were especially unlikely, they exited politics, leaving little noise in their wake. Financial supporters, in part for that reason, seldom gave them intense loyalty. Rural America, for example, survived off contract work for community planning and services in the 1980s.

Other organizations were established around specific types of government programs and were able to routinely deliver, but only on those federal benefits. The National Rural Housing Coalition and the National Rural Water Association gained the most attention by addressing narrow demands already served by existing farm and related rural programs. Both looked for marginal returns, primarily

by seeking to alter delivery mechanisms and the rules for them. Only the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association, with its utilities membership, had the resources to pursue goals from numerous programs while providing select member services. But much of NRECA's flexibility came from membership fears generated by opposition from publicly regulated private utilities; more recently, it was enhanced by White House and USDA hostility towards rural electric cooperatives. Protecting its considerable turf brought that organization resources only dreamed about by housing, water, and rural development lobbyists.

Experiences demonstrated that there were but few potentially useful issue niches around which to organize successful and sustainable rural interest groups (Browne, 1990,1991). There just was little for them, in an ongoing national policy sense, with which to identify. Few institutionalized sets of program benefits were available for them to claim as their own. Therefore, few rural groups formed and grew, certainly not enough to cover the wide range of rural problems. The grassroots as a source of resources failed to provide support; again, in a kind of catch-22, there were too limited a number of viable rural programs in operation for activists to have a reason to mobilize for their protection. This meant that, for the future as with the past, there existed little reason for those with resources to underwrite groups that wanted general rural policy reform, new and innovative programs that broke with the farm policy tradition, or, it seems, groups that represented the core of the rural poor and otherwise disadvantaged. Although the poor were long time beneficiaries of government, urban experiences had shown them to be dependent for their organizing successes on existing political reformers (Berry, Portney, and Thomson, 1991). While reform organizations that aided the poor had established places in the more conflictual politics of central cities, gaining credibility for them without a



special or specific cause was much harder in the far gentler and even less politically pluralistic confines of individual rural regions.

The existence and activism of some national rural groups, nonetheless, brings forward another advocacy question. Did other organized interests, ones not readily seen as rural, play an effective rural advocacy role? If some can do it, can't others, especially ones who can tap into a deeper set of resources? Rural residents and their representatives might well have made gains in policy representation by working not just on their own organizations, but within others. This was the intent of the Rural Governments Coalition, a formal working arrangement designed to come together each year and promote rural advocacy within the several nationally active associations of state and local government. But the third reason why rural advocacy did not expand was because such arrangements were, for actually meeting rural needs, unsatisfactory. Even the associations of the Coalition, with their solid memberships, periodically failed to regroup for each new congressional session, even when major legislation was pending.

These groups were trapped by the predominantly selective nature of policy benefits made available by the federal government. When they advocated on behalf of several programs for unique and different clients, some of whose benefits went to rural regions, only partial successes were won. A few programs out of many proposals passed. When, however, they concentrated on winning a major policy victory that allocated benefits quite broadly across urban and rural client lines, legislative success was much more problematic. And losses in the 1980s were predictable. Moreover, new policies, when they were forthcoming, increasingly were paid for by smaller budget allocations elsewhere.

Rural interests, for all the reasons discussed earlier in this subsection, were the beneficiaries likely to lose most in either bargain, just as they were

when bargaining with farm groups with ties to farm programs. In the first instance, rural programs were allocated for an increasingly distinct minority of U.S. residents. So decisionmakers within the broader group did not set legislative priorities for rural residents. In the case of groups where rural advocates were less involved than their urban counterparts, due usually to a lack of institutional support, rural activists complained frequently of being sold out or abandoned.

In the second instance, where the likelihood of obtaining new programs was reduced in return for a more significant policy change, rural interests even in victory were likely to lose through reallocation. While some new programmatic benefits were gained, the shrinking population of rural areas meant that program reductions for specifically designated rural areas were offsetting. Suburban population increases and gains in their political representation gave those places negotiating advantages within interest groups as well as in government. Central cities, in contrast, had a different advantage over rural communities. They provided the greatest institutional support for the poor and the disadvantaged, laying claim in the process to being interest spokespersons for how to implement services for these needy clients. Thus, city advocates rather than rural activists set the agenda for most reforms in public service delivery, further undervaluing the problems of persons who live in areas of open space and low population density.

These disadvantages, all of which were internal to the groups, meant that rural interests fared no better within the political machinations of general purpose or coalition-style interest groups than they had within the policymaking process. They often even were worse off. For within interest groups, as opposed to within the whole of government, rural advocates found no powerful senior

officials from peculiarly rural areas who wanted nothing more than bringing pork-barreled items back home. Nor did they find administrators who, at least prior to the budget cuts of the 1980s, were willing to fund community organizing efforts in specific rural areas. What worked only with minimal success in a decentralized and specialized Congress and administration worked less well within the democratic confines of the National League of Cities and the National Welfare Rights Organization. For all the overwhelming problems rural residents faced in organizing themselves, greater value was found in a well-focused rural identity than in an encompassing alliance. By relying on their own grassroots resource bases, organizations such as the Center for Rural Affairs at least articulated their own messages to national policymakers and other interests without a filter of coalition partners. Even then, however, groups like the Center were most likely to have organized successfully and gained national attention in farm regions with predominantly farm problems. Accordingly, their rural message had a farm policy accent. With the loss of external federal patronage in the 1980s, other rural organizing was made more difficult, ensuring again that the farm voice would speak the loudest from rural America even in policy dissent.

### **Surviving in Washington**

There are obvious implications in the dynamics of national politics owing to those grassroots circumstances. The problems of attracting and holding members and patrons, first of all, guarantees but a small rural lobby in Washington. Of the more than 200 groups and associations that lobbied regularly in the nation's capitol on agriculture and rural issues in the 1980s, fewer than 10 identified themselves as rural or as serving a rural nonfarm constituency (Browne, 1988). Even that number overstated the rural lobby; lobbying for some of those rural groups meant only issuing press releases and calling on but a

handful of policymakers was the extent of advocacy for some others. A consensus of rural policy specialists in government and in related policy work agreed that, apart from farm organizations, "there are only five rural lobbyists in town, not all live here, not all register (as lobbyists)." Several of those respondents argued that the list of "real rural activists" could be reduced to two, noting that those were the only recognizable names that openly and with vigor maintained a Washington presence. "When rural proposals come up," one legislative staffer mused, "you've really got to search to find three or four people to call to request information."

The contrast with farm lobbying was great. More than 25 organizations, not all of which lobbied regularly, represented themselves as part of the dairy network alone. About the same number represented the meat and livestock lobby; and the same for the feed and grains lobby. As the legislative staff respondent above continued: "And there are at least ten recognizable players for each of those three industries... I can find more people in town to talk serious stuff about peanuts than I can about rural policy."

Size is not the only difficulty faced by Washington's rural lobbyists: "Five people could do a hell of a job if they were working together on the right issue." But that respondent went on, "There are, except for something very narrow like the Mississippi Delta project, no rural issues for which that would be true."<sup>3</sup> As numerous rural activists recognized, there never existed a rural policy network. "A lot of people know each other very well, are friends, give strong support to each other," said a typical advocate. "But there is no forum, inside, outside, or between government for developing a plan. Why would there be, there's nothing to talk about." Without a recurring set of issues to advance and some common tactics to legitimate, rural policy officials and advocates

talked to one another but developed no network routines. Good intentions and a few solid professional friendships were the only resources available for building a national policy network; and they proved insufficient. The institutional targets--both programs and organizations--of rural advocacy were too limited as well to provide the linchpin of a policy network.

USDA funded but a scattered core of rural specialists, with most of the analysis of rural needs centered in the Economic Research Service. Other agencies were program specific: housing, credit, development, outreach. Little interagency work went on. Congress, for the most part, acted in much the same way. Programs which distributed rural benefits, moreover, were considered one at a time rather than as they related to one another, especially in appropriating funds. Farm and rural components of programs were seldom separated for analysis and explanation. In the House of Representatives, the rural development subcommittee spent far more time on its other items of jurisdiction, conservation and credit. The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee -- in name and deed-- had long linked rural development in its subcommittee to a strong defense of rural electrification. As a consequence, rural lobbyists developed no natural targets, no clustering of government allies with common purposes. Rural politics in Washington matured into a truly fragmented, piecemeal, and meandering process without institutional status.

The net result was that those few Washington-based rural lobbyists developed strategies of working a series of individuals within the Congress; and they did so by prompting numerous legislators for personal support on a large number of issues, a laundry basket approach that was still particularistic. Most lobbyists hoped for incremental program gains, and they eschewed general policy arguments that "will hopelessly mix up too many issues." Even, as that

respondent explained, "the term rural development is cause for concern--what does [it] mean?"

The creation or cooperation of existing single-issue congressional caucuses, alternatively, was one way of conserving resources and lobbying efficiently. The congressional Rural Health Care Coalition, for example, used legislative staff and the involvement of legislators to focus attention on a specified set of rural hospital problems, often inspired by local congressional district concerns. This freed lobbyist attention elsewhere. Members of Congress even were able to get farm group support for their proposals where rural lobbyists could not. While successful as a strategy for discussion, the Coalition as a single-focus alliance, nonetheless, illustrated the futility of keeping rural advocates together, and of keeping their goals in any way linked in Washington politics. "We have to use parts of the established order, if you will," was how strategy was summarized, "because we certainly cannot create any new order of our own around here."

#### **Burdened by Disarray**

The lack of capacity to bring order to the discussion of rural issues was another problem, distinct from the absence of a rural policy network. At another level, too much activism--not often nationally directed--emerged to suit some Washington rural advocates. Excess activism resulted from the very grassroots circumstances that impeded a strong national rural lobby. Although there was never a social movement that distinguished rural policy from farm problems, scattered local activists proliferated. Most supported farm protest but, in a few other regions, they used environmental activism to develop rural agendas of their own (Browne and Cigler, 1990). Rural advocates with local action agendas aligned themselves with dozens of regional community organizations, formed mostly

in the 1970s and especially the 1980s to encourage local self-help and the development of political awareness. Some of their leaders, such as those of Prairiefire Rural Action in Iowa, had organizational roots in the civil rights movement, emerged through the 1960s War on Poverty, with its locally based federal assistance programs. After a dead period, they entered the protests of the 1980s farm crisis, motivated in part by intense media coverage of social and political inequities. It, in an important sense, was perceived by activists as the only ongoing human welfare cause around, at least in farm regions of the country. <sup>Both</sup> Rural America and the Rural Coalition ~~both~~ nurtured these groups, turning away from the frustrations of working with national and most state-specific agricultural institutions. The focus of nearly all such local groups, whatever their origins, was populist-style political reform, with an emphasis on the problems of the rural disadvantaged, including existing farmers. Philosophically they disdained the idea, let alone involvement in, Washington-style network politics.

These groups, both their critics and proponents argued, presented an added problem to reaching agreement on goals for national rural policy. Their insistence on procedural before substantive reform was self-defeating for those with a national policy interest. As a typical critic complained, "These groups see a lot of policymakers back home, or at least they make noise that reaches out. They challenge existing rural policy and never offer alternatives. That, with a decline in rural population figures, is deadly since it refutes the usefulness of the small gains I'm trying to make in federal programs." A local activist agreed: "We're not interested in housing, water, and utility programs. What we want is a redistribution of local political power and a democratization of rural America. People need to decide their own fate and we're organizing them

to represent that view. I can hardly say good things about (government programs) that in my mind's eye just don't accomplish anything." As another added, "I'm here to set a broad new agenda."

This contest over national policy goals versus locally-directed reform, along with vociferous rhetoric, brought forward all the flaws of rural programs. It also led policymakers to be cautious in support for rural initiatives, and, in the face of bleak reports of declining rural communities, made many officials wonder whether those could be salvaged at any cost. This gave rise to discussions of SLTs, "shitty little towns" that would only spend but never repay federal investments. The credibility of what was accomplished previously through gains in rural housing and services as well as new business ventures was damaged further in Washington as a result. That had special consequence because of the inability of most of the locally-oriented groups to distinguish farm from rural policy--or indeed farmers from the otherwise disadvantaged. More than anyone in policy advocacy, these activists played on agrarian myths as first principles supporting their reform objectives without much recourse to objective reality. Their ties to populist farm protest, and the lack of other constituents and rallying cries, made the largest number of these vocal groups, in their own words, "primarily pro-family farmer." That further obscured rather than clarified rural policy debates.

But the damage went deeper. Perhaps because these groups worked at crosspurposes to doing something about minimalist national rural policy and its historical linkage to farm programs, populist activists had an intuitive appeal to both the small handful of organizational patrons and many community leaders. Since national rural policy efforts seemed futile, the logic went, resources should be directed elsewhere--most often at enhancing local rural institutions



or the capacity of local and state policy efforts at that level. Foundations directed programs at local self-help; land-grant universities offered technical assistance to communities as their contribution to rural development; and a few nationally-organized interest groups with some rural members assuaged them by calling for citizen initiatives as the key to rural change.

Unfortunately, with rural advocacy already at the brink of extinction in Washington, these efforts threatened a final abandonment. Patrons abandoning the rudiments of such an unendowed rural lobby, no matter how small, bode poorly for the future. It promises to remove the only public voice that both understands and openly articulates the distinction between farm and rural policies. That is, it abandons, at least in substantive policy debates, those left behind in favor of those successful few who stayed in agriculture.

The cost of emphasizing the local arena over national public policy initiatives also is questionable in terms of likely return on investment: rural interest groups always were near death at the grassroots; the existing anti-network activists have not developed broad memberships or widely active supporters of rural institutions. Moreover, they have not been careful about compatibility with the goals of their coalition partners, and there has been no evidence to suggest that strong rural institutions, including the farm, can be recreated through such efforts. Their successes have been difficult but largely won by using the defensive advantage local interests have in stopping--as opposed to starting--development projects. In addition, successes are most likely on issues of environmental degradation. Few efforts are even underway to create jobs or income for rural residents. The conflict between Washington advocacy and local reform, by having both confused and rejected substantive policy goals that get people out of poverty, serves mostly to perpetuate the agricultural

modernization/development paradigm. Policymakers, beset with demands to stabilize the economy, most want to promote policy that they see as having a growth potential for those back home. Rather than enliven policy debates, interest disarray only reinforces institutional farm values at the national level. At least, despite what these efforts truly mean to the self-esteem of local people, that has been the reaction from Congress.

#### RURAL POLICY AND COMPETING VALUES IN CONGRESS<sup>4</sup>

*This is where our grant starts ↓*

Congress, as inferred above, serves as the main target of rural advocacy. As Fiorina (1989) argued, a Washington establishment came into existence, for all the same reasons of going methodically about public business that led to the evolution of the agricultural establishment. Institutional power was clustered there and Congress became its keystone, the guardian of policy. Thus, Washington's rural advocates quite logically saw the greatest opportunities in Congress: legislators passed laws; they sustained them through appropriations; those laws had particularistic tendencies; they also had particularistic gatekeepers in charge; and, because of the importance of particularism to local electoral ties, lobbyists could find on Capitol Hill proponents of distinct places.

Even populist reformers, although they often failed to recognize the centrality of their own efforts there, worked the Congress. They wanted their own legislators back home to be part of their local and regional uprisings. So they prompted members in their districts to, in an activists's own words, "speak with some fire in their guts." Perhaps, even as locally-focused pessimists about national policy prospects, rural reformers hoped that those fires survived long plane rides to Washington and the reconvening of legislative sessions, bringing

even more localism to national politics.

Any contradictions between lobbying members of Congress and calling for grassroots participatory democracy were no less odd than the reformers' preoccupation with finding, when fires apparently could not be flamed, legislative challengers. Numerous rural reform groups, quite unlike conventional Washington lobbies that like to convince incumbents, sought new candidates for Congress who were more compatible than present office-holders with populist ideals. The point is, of course, that both types of rural advocates saw individual members of Congress, each thought of in some way as their own, linked to their varying definitions of organizational success. Members of Congress, protest rhetoric aside, are seen as the public officials most likely to deliver something of community use. Analysts, administrators, or newly-awakened local citizens all have a limited capacity to deliver policy benefits back home. So, with Congress as target, mixed messages about rural needs quite easily entered Capitol Hill deliberations, even if they were scrambled by interest disarray.

### The Irony of Congress

Have advocates, in both Washington and at the grassroots, and despite their differences, had misplaced faith and a foolish strategy? Might purely local strategies, as part of what is described in the next chapter, be more realistic? "Yes but no" answers both questions, for very complicated reasons. The institutional strength of farm policy and the existence of a nationally-networked agricultural establishment, as seen throughout this and the earlier chapter on rural policy failure, are very restrictive. Yet, Congress, as the Washington keystone to agriculture's own largely federal establishment, faces an ongoing dilemma: Should it be pragmatic and sympathetic to addressing numerous constituent wants and needs? Or should it be locked into historic patterns of

support for one policy paradigm, agricultural modernization/development, and rejection of anything seen as competitive? Despite institutionalized policy failure over time, the answer is not a simple one for legislators. There are pressures to do both, quite persuasive ones. Obviously, since activists are attuned to politics, the attractiveness of Congress to two different types of rural advocates was predicated on different but still logical assumptions as to the legislature's likely response. Both partially bear out.

This section, by exploring what Congress means to its members, explains Congress as both adaptive and still quite resistant to change, a combination that nonetheless still impedes rural policy reform. Legislators have not been incongruous in being notoriously short-term in their personal goals, and still frustratingly long-term in sustaining basic policy institutions. They just have not been able to become interested in rural policy from either perspective. They behaved neglectively on rural issues because doing otherwise was simply impractical. Because their jobs entailed two contrasting facets of work, members felt compelled to meet two sets of seemingly distinct expectations. But neither of those expectations were set, to any significant degree, by either national or rural activists. The past was too strong, and rural group resources were too weak to overcome other forces, mostly those favoring the farm. However, correctives would not be made if only the rural lobby could grow.

Understanding more about why rural initiatives have failed means also understanding the merging of the dual jobs held by U.S. representatives and senators. Having a congressional job with two parts owes to the difficulty of avoiding what must be viewed as legislative schizophrenia--that is, keeping the campaigner from the district responsible in word and deed to the congressperson who afterward goes to Washington. A legislator never needed to be the same

person in, for example, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, as he was in the nation's capitol. Space and time considerations are quite different, leading to a view that holds open the possibility of two different congressional worlds.

In Washington, as one world, policymaking is a preoccupation, shared of course with other legislative tasks. Most of the work done in formulating policy goes on in deliberations surrounding standing committee assignments (Smith, 1989; Smith and Deering, 1990; Sinclair, 1990). Or, it goes on as rank and file members attempt to influence committee bills. Committees--one way or another--hold the promise for legislators, if they do well, of effective lawmaking, sound policy content, and congressional influence (Fenno, 1966,1973; Ferejohn, 1974). Judgments about those things are, at the onset of a career, primarily subjective--made personally by the individual legislator and most directly and consequently by other Washingtonians, less precisely so by voters back home who see little of actual Washington work. Evaluations gain more objectivity over a period of years as issues, programs, and policies stand the tests of time, allowing observers more specifics to judge. But again this is principally a Washington perspective. Committees, and other opportunities for congressional interaction, in this way have long-term value for not just personal concerns. Members are judged by peers on how well they halt the erosion of valued policy, while also opening the gates to only the most pressing proposals for change.

In the other world of the district--or statewide for senators--both the nuances of Washington politics and the inherent value of longstanding institutions are lost on the crowd. Benefits or results matter most, not what took place in providing them. Or at least the perception that matters most is that the individual member of Congress truly stands for what his or her district or state needs and wants in the here and now. Voters are prepared to believe

that while Congress is awful, their own legislators serve them well (Parker and Davidson, 1979). Thus, for legislators, getting reelected has nothing necessarily to do with soundness of lawmaking skills, performance in Washington, or institutional relationships; except in that those may be one way to bring sufficient selective benefits home to keep particular users of policy benefits happy. What matters is a popular and flattering home style that casts the legislator, at each advancing point in time, in a favorable light (Fenno, 1978; Fiorina and Rohde, 1989). Incumbents, unless district characteristics keep them very safe from defeat, always live with the short-term fear that their light back home will dim.

There exists, however, great oversimplification in seeing committee work as one world, and the district image as that of another (Mayhew, 1974). Just because the congressional member's job has two very difficult parts, having unique expectations assigned to each, does not mean that they are unrelated. First, members are likely to want to do well in both worlds, not just survive in Washington (Fenno, 1973, 1978). But, second, and even if survival is all they seek, members are seldom free to be too comfortable with schizophrenia. Such a comfort zone would be found only where information flow between Washington and back home is quite restricted, where reputations never carry. That is hardly the case in the contemporary congressional world (Shepsle, 1989b; Arnold, 1990; Cohen, 1992). Michigan voters, like those from every other state, have been able to find out about at least some relevant indiscretions that took place in the capital. An array of sources exist for informing the electorate: the media, interest groups, party organizations, and, not least, future electoral challengers.

As a result, legislators always need to ask if their actions are visible,

if anyone back home cares about the matter at hand, and if anyone there could ever in the future be made to see it as relevant (Arnold, 1990). So policymaking in Washington is not carried out without careful attention to home district implications. The long-term gets carried to the short-term, at least in that actions taken even years ago can be brought back to a legislator by challengers and at a future point be given new meaning in the electorate's eyes. Exposure can alter severely a carefully constructed image, making it no longer part of an acceptable home style. This is especially likely to happen to those who ignore doing desirable things for the home district.

The battle over whom to serve, with its dangerous middle ground of bringing the past forward, ultimately controlled members of Congress on choices of farm versus rural policy. First, Congress, as its members explained, ended up far more responsive to old institutions since those so effectively dominated information flow to constituents. This response went on even when legislators seriously questioned the value of farm programs. Dismantling agricultural modernization/development institutions in favor of other rural policy initiatives was too fraught with political risks to follow such instincts and suspicions, though. Moreover, the lack of a rural constituency that in some general way favored diffuse policy benefits compounded the problem, made it even more improbable for the Congress to reduce its affinity for treating rural policy as but a slice of something else.

However, because Congress also is pragmatic in meeting the short-term wants of the here and now, a second response disrupted stability. Subtle but still marginal shifts occurred. The "something else" that encompassed rural policy no longer was seen as just a few add-ons for what were otherwise benefits for farmers. More was expected because of new policy demands, most of which were

tied to environmental use. An increasing number of constituents who were never a part of rural advocacy became identified with specific rural concerns. These people had unique expectations of rural America, and accordingly a diverse, yet relatively small set of legislators chose at least to begin the process of providing for them. Unfortunately, these emerging new interests in rural lands and places reflected the same old neglects of rural communities and their disadvantaged as seen previously among farm groups. Given interest disarray among rural advocates, however, the new use claimants seized the mantle of policy reform, leaving jobs and income issues ignored. Those points, by emphasizing legislative perceptions of the relationship between Washington work and home style expectations, will be explained further in the following subsections.<sup>5</sup>

#### Who Cares About What, and Why?

Members of Congress and their staffs only gradually revealed how they felt that a modern Congress brought about this policy result. Assessing the likelihood of congressional support for rural policy first entailed determining legislators' likes and dislikes, their policy priorities, and things felt of relatively low importance. As individual legislators, what issues claimed their attention? From that perspective, members of Congress were unexpectedly attentive to agricultural and rural policy debates, and only a very rare individual was without distinct feelings or opinions on these topics. Supporters of the prevailing direction of current policy outnumbered those with mixed views--that is, general support tempered by several observations on the need for reform--by more than two to one, and they outnumbered those opposed by more than four to one.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, only half of the opponents of agricultural and rural policy were overtly hostile, expressing discontent in terms of fraud and waste. Other opponents saw it only as a misallocation of scarce federal dollars relative

*How many were polled? Describe the survey.*



to other uses.

What was it they supported? Nearly three-quarters of members accurately understood agriculture and rural policy to be complex, a broad and diverse set of programs with numerous types of constituents from agribusinesses to food stamp recipients. Only 16 percent saw that policy as organized to serve just farm purposes. However, that recognition of complexity was misleading; it did not signal the leading edge of support for serving diverse constituents over farmers.

This was seen best in the opinions of those with mixed views. When policy views were mixed, many were opposed to that diversity and the accommodation of still more interests in agricultural and rural policy. That is, they disliked elements of those trends of the past two decades that broadened policy goals. Members with mixed views about current policy divided rather equally over whether they wanted more or fewer programs for such nonfarm beneficiaries as consumers or urban residents. But, among those members, considerably more (around three to one) found themselves disagreeing with the content of farm programs rather than over questions of appropriate benefits for nonfarmers. Also, few of those with mixed feelings about farm programs wanted less of a farm emphasis in agricultural and rural policy. Disagreements remained for the most part embroiled in the decades-old battle over, in essence, whether there would be greater market-oriented policy or more government controls on production. Proponents of both positions, when their views over current policy were mixed, expressed content that elements of their own positions were found in some programs. Yet they also were unhappy with those parts of programs that favored the other approach. Not doing enough for small-scale farmers was a complaint from several of these legislators; only two, in contrast, worried over neglect of the rural poor.

Members with mixed views and those who voiced general support both suggested quite strongly then that the congressional agenda was ruled, with credibility, through persistent and primary attention to farm problems. This suggested the same capture of the agricultural agenda by farm interests as was true of the pre-explosion heyday of the farm policy network. As congressional views on current policy demonstrated, members who saw problems with current policy had a distinctly institutional focus. Their most serious disagreements were not with the historic direction of agricultural modernization/development policy or those left behind because of its emphasis. Rather, as Congress has since the Brannan Plan of 1949, members were squabbling over specific price support and production control mechanisms. Other things, especially among supporters, were legitimately part of the policy mix, though. The degree to which farm policy had evolved to a multi-faceted concern with such problems as food, safety, trade, and the environment was well understood, widely supported even by those who questioned further accommodation at the farmer's expense, and subject to less controversy than basic farm issues.

Even within that broad consensus of opinion, however, most legislators did want more from agricultural and rural policy performance than their level of general support indicated. In fact, even with high levels of general support, only 11 percent of legislators had no specific complaints about some particular aspect of that encompassing set of policies. While most of these members considered themselves supportive, they still kept one or more reform objectives in mind and usually had worked on them. Respondents demonstrated this best by identifying issues on which office staff spent the greatest amount of time. These, in almost all instances, were the members' own personal priority issues within the agricultural and rural policy area. Such matters were selected for

legislative contest as among the few that each office, because of its own resource limitations, tried seriously to influence.

Only nine percent of congressional offices had not spent significant amounts of time on some issue or another that was seen by the participants as appropriately agricultural or rural. Most offices noted three or more priorities, either to defend or change. Few had any more because of unwieldy demands on time. As might be expected, over half of those directly allocated benefits to farmers. But nearly as many were for agriculture and rural policy positions that allocated benefits to--or otherwise were championed mainly by--agribusinesses, environmentalists, animal rights advocates, farm workers, education and research organizations, consumers, the poor, and rural communities. As such, legislators were involved with a broader constituency than their attitudes toward farm problems suggested.

Yet congressional attention was not divided equally among that wide variety of nonfarm programs and constituents. In that sense, institutions won out more frequently than reformists in getting policy attention. Well over half of office priorities were for three types of things: benefits to agribusiness on trade related matters or to public agricultural organizations, or they were environmental and conservation reforms. Only five percent of nonfarm priorities of the members involved any specifically-stated rural issues or programs. Except for support of animal rights issues, legislators were less involved on rural matters than for any other aspect of agricultural policy. Moreover, each of those few rural priorities, as they pertained to programs, emphasized housing, water, health, or electric cooperative problems. Some concern was expressed for service delivery mechanisms, but only one legislative office spent any degree of time on what its staff explained as their response to rural poverty. Thus, even

as rural problems were slighted, the small amount of attention directed there--as advocates expected--went to existing modernization/development institutions with their historic farm policy ties.

The characteristics of the members' district or state helped explain the determination of priorities. The importance of home style strategies by legislators appeared quite evident, though not overwhelmingly so on traditional farm constituent matters. Two of the nonfarm issues capturing greatest attention in congressional offices-- trade and the environment-- were championed disproportionately by those with specific types of constituents. Legislators from urban blue collar districts, especially those high in agricultural employment, allocated great amounts of time to trade. Those from predominantly white collar districts, usually low in farm employment, were by far those most involved with environmental issues. In both cases, when asked, legislators expressed the belief that those were the key issues in this policy area for their own electoral constituencies.

Other legislators also offered constituent-based explanations as to why certain issues were prioritized. Central city legislators (but certainly not all of them) spent the most time on food and nutrition issues, again because these were perceived to benefit their constituents more than did any other part of agriculture and rural policy. The presence of a land-grant college, numerous food handlers and processors, or research laboratories in the district also were related to the time legislative offices spent on specific issues unique to constituent clientele.

The exceptions to the logical patterns between district characteristics and priority issues were as revealing as the actual relationships. Issues in support of farmers were prioritized by legislators from all types of districts: strongly

rural and heavily urban, especially high but often low in farm employment, and high white collar as well as high blue collar. Unlike any other constituency, farmers generated unexpectedly widespread support and a wide range of proponents. Members of Congress, in this case, argued that farmers as an industry were vital to their districts, even though clearly not economically dominant. They also were seen as unusually vocal and well organized, especially back home. In deviating from district explanations of what was important policy, respondents also noted that agricultural development and the protection of a healthy U.S. agriculture were important nationally, not just locally. Even when they admitted to being poorly informed about agricultural and rural policy, legislators expressed concern by working on a wide range of farm issues: a specific commodity program, family farm preservation, trade protection, farm credit, environmental incentives, or whatever they had been persuaded was necessary. Clearly the historic institutionalization of agriculture, at both the grassroots and in Washington, came into play in structuring legislator priorities.

Attention to rural issues also defied prediction based on district characteristics, following instead institutional practices. This, however, was a matter of underrepresentation rather than overrepresentation. Legislators, even when they lived in highly rural states or districts with few farm employees, did not necessarily focus on rural policy problems. They, in fact, were more likely to spend time on farm problems. Most ignored other rural programs and controversies. Only a handful of rural legislators, from both high and low farm employment places, prioritized obvious district problems. A few from high blue collar districts, especially where high poverty or low income persisted, worked hard on housing, water, roads, and other programs where constituents had specifically identifiable needs. In contrast, a few others, all from high white

collar rural districts, prioritized health care and utilities issues.

These patterns explained more about agricultural and rural policy change than did general congressional consensus. It made clear why some issues, such as trade and the environment, gained greater emphasis than others in final legislative passage. Home style responses mattered. Constituent influence, at least indirectly, was a major influence. These patterns also illuminated further the institutional weaknesses of rural policy and the reasons for its continued neglect relative to farm policy. Farmers, despite their critics, got what for agricultural and rural problems appeared as a rash of congressional supporters.

#### **How Outside Information Matters In Selecting Issues**

While the above suggests the relatively strong influence of district or state in selecting priorities for a member of Congress, what brings its impact to bear? And why are there notable exceptions? Legislators and staff cited several influence factors: frequent visits by them back home, frequent back home visitors in the office, the desirability of recruiting staff from home for the Washington office, the need to have messages constantly sent to media back home, maintenance of permanent offices throughout their district or state, reliance on mail to judge local public opinion, increased computer capacity to file and merge data on district and state constituents with the expressed issue concerns of each one, and the existence, especially in the House of Representatives, of a nearly perpetual campaign plan. Legislators, most believed, got to know their district or state better than they did Washington. Many believed, because of the preponderance of time spent on constituent matters (Johannes, 1884), that most legislators understood district operations better than those of Congress. They felt that to be especially true for agricultural and rural policy with its complex and difficult to comprehend programs and, as they noted, often boring and

even arcane content. Too much time was required to master it completely; and there was no necessity of doing so.

Thus, Congress, within the offices of individual members, was organized very effectively to process large amounts of highly specific information, much of it home style in purpose. At the very least, members chose issues with large amounts of district or state information available as reference points. That, members felt, made it possible either to anticipate or identify constituent reactions to nearly every anticipated public action. With constituent based or selectively received programs, such as those that have dominated agricultural and rural policy, two things were seen as predictable: voters knew how policy affected them and they watched carefully for proposed changes. In policymaking, and particularly in being able to choose but a few policy priorities, a legislator's home style came easily to Washington. What legislators discovered, largely through citizen complaints and the need to react to them, was that they lacked constituents who voiced a rural identity based on values of residency or business locale. But farmers, even with declining numbers, still seemed ubiquitous.

Legislators clearly showed the linkage between home and Washington when they selected information sources for use in their own decision-making. In more than 85 percent of offices, those who made choices contended that constituents, of all the information sources outside the Congress, provided that which most directly affected their choice of priority issues for this policy area. Over 75 percent valued constituent information most highly among all noncongressional alternative sources in deciding the specifics of issues. So constituents mattered a great deal in deciding how a member stood on an issue as well as the general content of what his or her office proposed and took to committee or the

floor. This was not merely genuflecting to popular will, however. Nor was it simple grassroots democracy at work. Rather it was a distinct biasing that produced the uneven affects seen above of serving only some district characteristics on issue choices.

Nearly 75 percent of legislators, all ones who valued and used constituent information first, did so because they trusted their contacts back home more than they did Washington alternatives--lobbyists, policy professionals, and agency administrators--or the media. Trust existed for two reasons. First, constituents back home appeared generally more reliable and loyal. They often addressed specifics; and they did so in such a way that legislators and staff could gauge district or state opinions on the wide range of issues Congress had on the potentially expanded agricultural and rural policy agenda. Legislators were able to sort out both what could be ignored and what truly perplexed their voters. For this reason, phone calls were made routinely from Washington offices so constituents could confirm or recommend rejection of proposals raised by lobbyists or by other policymakers.

Second, constituent contacts were trusted because congressional offices learned over time and with experience to sort out serious and relevant information from crank calls. In effect, trust was created.<sup>7</sup> Mail and phone calls from the district or state, for most offices, were only very rough indicators of what mattered back home. Questionnaires sent to district voters provided the same. On specific issues, staff--and often members--initiated calls to or visited carefully selected individuals to request reactions, get ideas, solicit proposals, and generate local support for what could be given priority office attention. In many offices, calls and visits were with constituents previously identified as individuals likely to be useful in a legislator's local



communications network: the cattleman, the rice grower, or the favored city manager. Farm or business advisory committee members or simply individuals who over time gained trust, not some typical citizen back home, were the valued contacts. Expertise was felt important, at least in the form of personal experience, so local agricultural professionals as well as successful farmers often were sought out. So too were individuals associated with active lobbying efforts tied to the home district or state. Many of the same contacts were used as well on the perpetual election campaign, and information, both about and from each one, was maintained through office computers and communications equipment.

This process of securing information and selecting issue positions was a severe detriment to rural policy, especially for the poor who seldom made it to positions of ongoing contact and personal trust with legislators or staff. Agricultural and rural problems, as identified from most constituent contacts, meant little more than tinkering with farm policy to better serve changing environmental or regulatory needs. One-third of the congressional offices maintained farm advisory committees and used several of the people on them as primary information sources on all rural questions. Other than roads and health care, few local information sources raised rural rather than farm problems. When other rural residents did play an active part in a legislator's local constituent network, the perception remained that those people talked about many particularistic things, but seldom about the need for national rural policy initiatives or even the downside of living in the country. On the contrary, constituents kept praising how fortunate they were to have rural homes and lifestyles. The lack of local institutions had an obvious effect, with no galvanizing of public policy issues around community problems. Like farmers, these contacts were involved primarily with occupational challenges, so they

raised problems of, for example, their own business or school administration. Such problems, in the congressional press of deciding quickly what issues to prioritize and which to discard, were relegated to a different policy arena and another staff member, ones without a rural focus. Farmers, often advised and assisted by interest groups representatives, were advantaged because they were seen as addressing specific industrial policy concerns, albeit ones tinged by lifestyle problems. They, as a result, gained a legislative advantage from having recognizable issues with existing program ties.

The same concerns of the Washington office affected legislative reliance on other information sources. Rural problems, and again most especially those of the poor, were left without alternative advocates or spokespersons. Members and congressional staff relied on Washington lobbyists for much of the remaining information they needed yet were unable to secure from constituents. For those who ranked constituents first, lobbyist information was next most important. For members who did not rank constituents highest in importance for issue selection and trust, most all selected interest group representatives. Furthermore, members who used constituents to select issues for contest within the legislature, but who turned elsewhere for more detailed information to determine the content of their positions, overwhelmingly looked to lobbyists. One important reason was because lobbyists who became influential also, when possible, came to members and staff with district and state needs integrated into their proposals.

The third ranked, and far less regularly used, sources were consultants and non-agency professionals who had reputations in Washington for knowledge on issues, geographic regions, or specialized policy problems. Like lobbyists, consultants and professionals generally were seen to be trustworthy and capable

of delivering relatively narrow information that supplemented constituent concerns. Unlike lobbyists and constituents, though, professionals were usually looked to for less particularistic explanations of likely policy results. Even in commenting on local politics back home, they were prized as a safety valve against shortsighted national policy.

Unfortunately, as seen in the last section, the rural lobby was small, and in comparison to the diversity of farm and agribusiness interests its advocates were relatively invisible. Members and staff frequently admitted to overlooking or just forgetting them. They lacked recognizable presence. Rural policy experts, outside of government, were even less visible, with most congressional offices failing to have a clue as to who they might be or where to find one if doing so became useful. When in a very few instances land-grant rural policy professionals were recognized as helpful experts, they were regarded usually as constituents who had developed over time some personal ties to the office. Like all constituents, office personnel noted that, with experts, they had "reliable favorites" in the individual schools with whom they preferred to work. Such selective use, with no concern for digging deeper, further restricted the already short supply of rural policy ideas going to Congress: "Oh yes, I don't need help from any radical proposals being sent my way."

Rural policy ideas also were blocked by the somewhat surprising rejection of other, quite knowledgeable and resource rich information sources. At least the media and public agencies were not acknowledged as useful in broadening the range of policy ideas. The media, locally and nationally, was subject to considerable distrust by most rural legislators because of what members of Congress perceived as a general pattern of imprecise, even purposely misleading, coverage. Most urban legislators, in contrast, found the media helpful in

providing them what they considered to be an overview of farm and rural problems that they otherwise lacked. But reporters were faulted by these legislators as well because their coverage seldom covered topics of importance, such as food assistance, to the priorities of urban residents within this policy area. What limited the media's usefulness, as legislators of all sorts saw it, was the relative degree of expertise: the more they or their staff understood an issue, the less satisfactory and informative they found media coverage. The less the congressional office understood about the issue, the more the quite brief reports of the media were important.

Federal agencies ranked only as somewhat more useful than the media, but only a rare legislator used agency information as a primary guide in setting priorities or for determining a policy position. Only the data collection responsibilities of agencies--as opposed to advice and consultation--were valued consistently by members, and that was most true for USDA. Essentially, for over 70 percent of respondents, agency analyses that offered policy prescriptions were distrusted and usually disregarded. Agencies, in fact, ranked lower in trust than did the media. Four problems of agency information were cited: too much intervention in information collection by ranking administration officials; too much embargoing and censorship of studies; too many questionable assumptions built into analytic models, and a general lack of easy readability and use of basic research reports. While most of that criticism was directed at the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration were seen as little better. Despite what were believed as often good employee intentions, all three organizations were felt to be more adversaries of Congress than they were helpful as information sources. To a great extent, such attitudes reflected the attempts of presidents since Richard

Nixon to isolate Congress from executive branch analysis and support, limiting congressional power in the process. This greatly politicized agency activity, creating legislative hostility in the doing.

USDA suffered an added credibility problem that other agencies did not because its work was perceived to be directed primarily toward specific farm policy reform goals, especially in promoting free market principles. This, not surprisingly, irritated many congressional proponents of existing policy, and it also angered numerous members interested in nonfarm issues who saw neglect of their personal issues. Legislators with both preferences saw USDA's research on such topics as the environment, food quality, and rural development as purposely more directed toward undermining farm price support policy than seriously advancing the debate on the matter purportedly at hand. Rural proposals and analyses from USDA, for this reason, were criticized and rejected by three times as many legislators as those who, when asked, praised them. More frequently, however, reports--rural and farm--were just ignored. Usually these were dropped in the trash of individual member's offices or that of their committee staff, simply because they provided little or no data or information about problems under discussion in the home district or state.

The net result was that no effective and broadly credible federal mechanisms existed to counter home style tendencies in national agriculture and rural policymaking. Quite clearly, however it functioned, the agricultural policy network was not one where agricultural administrators played a guiding role in providing information directly to members of Congress. No one was seen to be challenging or even commenting on old institutional arrangements. Constituents and lobbyists were seldom given to such detailed critiques. And, of course, even to the discomfort of some legislators and staff, the problems of

the rural poor under those conditions were the ones most likely to stay lost in local and farm politics.

### **Information and Action Within Congress**

The importance of advocacy in setting the stage for congressional decisionmaking should be clear from the responses noted above. In that sense, rural advocates followed a necessary strategy, but gained little help. Congress, as dozens of its active policymakers explained, served as a reactive rather than proactive keystone of both the agricultural and the Washington establishments. Members viewed their reactive nature as central to understanding their behavior. They found Congress incredibly hard to move either on their own with policy proposals or with a minimum of prodding. Even congressional investigation was spurred by external forces. So advocacy, especially in the absence of trust in the administration, was necessary. But they also noted that prodding, from any source, was insufficient to generate action. It also needed to be well received, even abetted through active cooperation (Browne, 1988; Hansen, 1991). Thus advocacy, while necessary, was also insufficient.

Who mattered most? And why? Prodding, as abetted by legislators, came to individual offices from three principal sets of agricultural and rural policy advocates. Reasons for their acceptance varied. First, farmers did it and won widespread support; they were especially well organized and their program interests were long-term and directly tied to what members saw as the central purpose of this policy. Moreover, elevated by myth, farmers were seen as popular: people hard to attack, depended on to supply food, and doing so inexpensively. Second, farm and agribusiness lobbyists effectively promoted trade. They offered the hope for a way out of the chronic problems of surplus that have troubled agricultural modernization/development policy.

Coincidentally, their demands offered aid to a troubled national economy and its growing trade deficit. Third, environmentalists and those with related concerns about food and resource quality got in because they pushed hard. Legislators saw them as uniquely popular with upper and middle income voters and as capable of calling into question some basic premises of longstanding farm programs. Also, these advocates played on well-accepted, somewhat mythic expectations about what both voters and members wanted in their food: supplies that were safe and plentiful into the indefinite future.

What each of those three had in common, even faced with diversity of goals and sometimes open conflict within each advocate set, was mainstream appeal. These advocates dealt in important public problems, and they each were central to the institutionalized concerns of what evolved as agricultural modernization/development policy. So Congress, in the short-term response to home style problems, was amazingly long-term in reflecting agrarian values of the past, even if it was moved politically to distrust USDA. More peripheral issues, the add-ons of the 1970s and 1980s that enhanced the overall appeal of agricultural and rural policy as a legislative package, were like rural policy in that most of those issues lacked an institutional basis in agricultural modernization/development. They shared two other things: fewer advocates who prodded on their behalf as well as fewer members who responded to the prodding.

Another critical question remains. Because these issues were favored by such distinct minorities, both within and external to Congress, why have things such as food stamps and animal protection persisted as parts of national public policy? Without strong congressional support, and faced with budget pressures to cut expenditures, why were such programs not simply dropped or policy demands just disregarded? And, despite their stature, why were such institutions of the

agricultural establishment, from research through extension, not cut dramatically in funding levels? After all, few member offices gave them priority status or allotted them much time. Also, as has been noted, their personnel and organizations received decidedly mixed reviews from members of Congress on their contributions to policy. The implication, of course--and one that members agreed with--is that decisions made in Congress take into account far more than just who matters most in providing information and ideas as part of an ebb and flow in producing policy. Policy does not emerge as just a sum of prevailing constituent and lobbyist preferences as these muster support from a collection of congressional offices. This is not simple "majority-preference rules" politics. There is instead, in the words of one legislator, "a rounding out process that produces good policy only because of the existence of direct member-to-member communication." Respondents, to make decisions, focus on internal congressional relationships to help sort through and use information from outside Congress. Informal and personal contact was valued most.

Members talked to one another, and staff from one office talked to staff in another, for three related reasons. First, they need to know what sense to make of the vast amount of information they process. Second, they need to understand how district and state problems fit with the national scope of public policy problems. Third, they want to avoid the risk of supporting legislation that might likely produce disastrous effects, either personally or for government. Nearly 65 percent of members claimed they always talked over each personally important issue with a colleague, usually with a number of legislators whom they had learned over time to respect.

Only 15 percent were so independent that they but infrequently talked things over with other members. Moreover, for most members, these discussions



were considered of greater importance than was information from outside the Congress in deciding which issues and positions to emphasize from among the many brought to each office. The overwhelming number of conversations were with other members of the legislator's state delegation or with those who served on the committee having likely jurisdiction over a bill, but they extended to such things as partisan and even personality factors.

Members and staff argued that these internal discussions--in addition to eliminating issues--made members aware, at least in the most general terms, that both support and a rationale existed for keeping intact programs that lacked obvious constituent or interest group importance. Innumerable lessons emerged. For example, legislators learned that farm policy goals depended on public research. Urban legislators, despite presently low involvement, viewed food programs as well-earned but unthreatened spoils that need not be protected with exacting attention. Animal rights activists, while often seen as inane, were explained as presenting a likely image problem for legislators who challenged them. In short, interpersonal networking of legislators and staff defined what was appropriate and necessary to agricultural and rural policy, given the current practicalities of politics and previous bargains. From ensuing discussions emerged a set of related issues and programs that the Congress and those who worked with its members saw as constituting a whole. That set of necessarily-addressed issues is what political scientists have labeled a "policy domain", an ongoing forum in the Washington establishment where some ideas ruled (Salisbury et al, 1987).

In agriculture and rural policy as in most policy areas, committees were important because they anchored the domain, and gave the forum a specific setting. Committee members, most certainly in agriculture, have long shared

common perceptions of which constituents and what policy directions they were in Congress to serve (Jones, 1961; Lyons and Taylor, 1981; Boynton, 1989, 1990). The operational premises of the domain, in that sense, determined what would be addressed in committee, what would not, and what actions would take place when issues were neglected by individual members.

Congressional interaction, as it reinforced the legitimacy of domain politics in Congress, had important consequences for rural policy, actually enhancing some rural issues and resident needs while effectively burying others. Legislators and staff, with an eye both to drafting and passing bills on the floor, used experience and institutional memory to draw lines around what they, as individual offices, could and must address.

Accordingly, the agriculture committees, including appropriations, found it relatively easy to abet and consolidate the general demands of those who prodded them into farm bills and other legislation. Sorting out the competing specifics of who would get what was harder, but networking interest groups helped (Browne, 1988,1990; Hansen, 1991). The idea of "domain rule" reinforced the inclination of legislators and lobbyists to assist one another (Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, 1963; Hayes, 1981). Despite diversity within the farm sector, among agribusinesses, and among environmentalists, claimants only won when they struck an accord. Recognizing this, both members of Congress and group leaders accommodated others whenever they could, opening up even committee decisionmaking to the ad hoc demands of some nonagricultural outsiders. Traditionalists in Congress, in being forced to deal with the legitimacy of the remaining institutions of the agricultural establishment, necessarily drew on even agency information and problem-solving skills during committee deliberations. To do otherwise would have been futile. Any widespread dissension by even a

politicized USDA on whether or not the appropriate issues were addressed presented non-agricultural committee members with serious questions of the committees' credibility, not to mention a threat of presidential veto. Other policy claimants who fit the domain's policy parameters gained recognition as well, even when they lacked popularity or presently-active proponents.

This allowed entry for, in one member's very direct words, "anyone who can upset the applecart by making it obvious that what they want unavoidably matches with (our work)." This network explosion gave at least some small program pieces to a wide variety of claimants who were traditionally agricultural outsiders. It also pressured forward at least most of the other program pieces for institutional insiders who lacked dominate constituent voices and it kept giant expenditures (larger than price supports) alive for food stamps.

But this did little for rural policy, except to further its reputation as a set of issues bringing inherently bad choices. Rural advocates and legislative offices that prioritized rural issues, operating within such constraints, were left an incredible challenge in dealing with the domain concerns of the House and Senate agriculture committees. At best, rural proponents could latch on and ride a farm program that previously had been given a selective rural policy twist, such as housing loans with FmHA. Failing that, they could try to claim a portion of a politically less secure but at least well-institutionalized program--for example, research tied to the responsibilities of land-grant universities and their experiment stations. If those goals did not fit, the next tactic was the more problematic and less appealing one: fitting their demands with those of recently enfranchised domain constituents such as sustainable agriculturalists or organic farmers.

Beyond those obviously narrowing windows of not especially relevant

opportunity, rural proponents were left only with the option of securing a new program that stood on its own merits. The only hope of winning, then, was to force legislators to talk among themselves about rural conditions and problems, thus forcing committee action. That tactic had some appeal for advocates, in that most senators and large numbers of house members--especially on the agriculture committees--still had some rural residents, campaigned among them, and did hear at least periodically of their plight. That is, rural problems and people were something that members, if prodded, easily conversed with one another about, even to the point of appreciating the usefulness of legislation. But use of that tactic by advocates was not appealing for legislators, and they failed to abet them vigorously. To some extent, given concerns over their district, affected members had to talk about those problems once the specter of congressional action was raised--either that or possibly face later charges back home of district and state neglect during a time of congressional attention.

As members knew, however, impediments to new rural policy were enormous under such circumstances. Therefore, it was a risk simply to get involved in the discussions, just as it was to avoid them. Since the invocation was one that called for policy reform, resulting legislation, if funded adequately, would have to be highly redistributive from existing constituents. Accordingly, rejection was always predetermined, even if legislators had to find a tactful way of saying no. As an example, the hearings that led to the proposed Rural Economic Development Act of 1990 generated serious discussion among legislators, sincere interest and sympathy from them, several suggestions for innovative programs, and, later, nearly complete legislative inertia as other priorities and constituents took over. That act, and later its mostly unsuccessful incorporation into the 1990 farm bill, presented the agriculture committees with

the imponderable choice of redefining agreement, throughout both houses of Congress, as to the widely understood, essential purposes of the agricultural policy domain. Or they could make a symbolic gesture. But going to great lengths to pass a marginal bill that really would do quite little for--or even waste money on--the problems and nearly voiceless people that they had diligently mulled over was an equally bad choice. In 1990, Congress logically did neither of the above. It passed instead a few farm bill provisions linked mainly to existing services and their delivery.

Thus, domain politics, while useful in determining the legitimacy of issues, exacted its price as expected, by creating only difficult choices for some policies, especially those that had no solid grassroots base. The frustrations of inertia were widely shared in 1990 as they were earlier, no less felt by members of Congress than they were by outsiders and activists who were mobilized in support of the Rural Development Act and previous rural initiatives. Members, even though they followed other agricultural priorities, still expressed disdain for their inability to help district or state on identified rural problems. At least, several members hated looking like they had been unable to help.

Yet options were not closed just because the committee-centered policy domain proved ponderous in reconciling politically acceptable solutions with identifiable rural problems. There were still other, noninstitutionally determined choices. Congress, because it mixed short- and long-term perspectives, always proved somewhat malleable; and, after the reforms of the 1970s, this meant relatively open and permeable committees (Cohen, 1992). Frustrations over institutional constraints on rural issues led over the years to policy changes, even while the institutions and domain rules of agriculture

remained as they were. If rural development was unable to pass, for example, and if agricultural and existing rural programs could not accommodate other policy objectives because of domain constraints, there were other committees where members could take their problems. Members, as explained in the earlier chapter on institutional development and rural policy failure, went there. Issues of rural education, commerce, infrastructure, and the development of nonfarm economies were addressed increasingly by other committees through their own legislative initiatives. Rural issues were subsumed as well by committees such as House Interior and Insular Affairs, many of whose members wanted to redefine the economic use of rural spaces.

These obviously were not popular choices either. Despite the flexibility of doing so, the problems of taking rural issues elsewhere in Congress were seen as significant and troubling by members from numerous types of districts and states. First, they saw rural needs as not being well addressed specific to the problems of open spaces and low population density. Second, they believed that rural service programs, for such things as infrastructure, gained greater attention than rural problems of human need. Congress, members felt, left the latter problems to be addressed through what were viewed primarily as urban programs. Moreover, these urban-identified priorities were allowed to be set by central city legislators. Third, they feared that the primary constituents for new rural initiatives beyond the agricultural policy domain were upper and middle class, motivated by the desire to escape and use rural regions but not necessarily be part of maintaining them. Under such conditions, of course, even when rural problems found some degree of freedom from farm policy, rural communities and the rural poor still faced bleak prospects for public policy assistance.

## The Importance of Congressional Ambiguities

It was not without irony that many institutional defenders of the agricultural policy domain in Congress dealt with their frustrations by allowing a distasteful erosion in committee control on rural issues. They, on and off the agricultural committees, followed a logic that defied strategies of growing influence prized by members of the House committees on Energy and Commerce as well as Education and Labor. And that strategy also defied decades of previous growth in the traditional committees on issues seen as appropriately those of agriculture. The conclusion suggested by that behavior is that considerable internal discontent exists among members of Congress, and respondents agreed by willingly expressing it.

Legislators with few farm or rural ties, even with minimal information about rural problems, fully supported jurisdictional erosion on those issues. Many urban legislators and their staffs seriously questioned whether members who dealt with agricultural issues--no matter what their committee assignments--could exercise effective oversight of the human resource components of their policy. Agrarians, despite their charm, were suspect for being over extended. Industrial policy and welfare policy failed to mix, the logic went, and members with either farm or environmental priorities failed in the view of many colleagues to clarify their legislative intent as one or the other. They benefitted by having it both ways, even in following principally an industrial-style development model. In that sense, the restrictive nature of agricultural modernization/development institutions, at least in a general way and certainly not by all, was recognized throughout the House and Senate. Despite agriculture's serving numerous and diverse constituents, in-house congressional critics of the current process realized that the politics of the agricultural policy domain were those of an

economic sector rather than ones of a region. Somebody else had better take care of the region and its people.

It was not just urban members of Congress who recognized this situation. Many legislators who came from rural districts and states admitted that they had no time for human resource problems. In essence, they even suspected themselves of claiming unrealistic and unmanageable responsibilities. These members had an extraordinarily hard time in both defending a sector and working on regional matters when the two no longer overlapped in the consideration of district or state problems. Even when constituent contacts from back home did not point out discrepancies, domain discussions within Congress made that point clear. The closely-knit and well-institutionalized network relationship between sector interests and congressional representatives effectively foreclosed choices. As legislators, with limited political capital, they promoted farm policy in Washington. That was their job, no matter who held their congressional seats. Moreover, because the farm sector was so diverse and fragmented by commodity and regional production problems, there was little room for even some of these legislators to become primarily rural proponents with less of an interest in farm or ranch problems. They promoted, whether they were on or off the agriculture committees, specific and unique district and state needs of farm policy in Washington, backing and not undermining their colleagues in the process. There were almost no exceptions to this division of labor. It was one member's job to take care of dry beans, another mohair, and someone else apple growers. Others took care of Southeastern soybeans and Western cattle producers.

No wonder, since most legislators were perceptive about the risks they encountered in eventually being held accountable for past actions, powerful ambiguities clouded the ranks of those who saw themselves representing farm and



rural interests (see also Shepsle, 1989a). Many were glad that no strong district or state imperatives made it essential for them to gain a seat on the agricultural committees, or on committees dealing with public lands. These legislators disliked even the thought of dealing, on a recurring basis, with either institutional agricultural problems or the dynamics of everyday farm policy defense. Part-time and largely ad hoc defense, for those not on committees with primary jurisdiction over farm and ranch problems, was demanding enough.

Several members of the committees, especially for agriculture and public lands, explained that there were no other reasons but reelection why they had even sought such a seat (see also Weber, 1989). The committee tasks of agriculture and public lands management were viewed as incredibly parochial relative to other committee assignments, and positions on them lacked national publicity value. Moreover, more than on other committees, members on the agriculture committees felt it necessary to defend some programs that were acknowledgeably bad policy in order to protect good ones. Numerous members, in comparison with their work on other committees, admitted to a serious dislike of agriculture committee assignments. They had these positions, and because of constituents, could not get off. Those from some farm and Western states were on strategically-selected committees indefinitely, while others performed admirably and waited until a seat that could better be marketed to constituents opened up, such as one on tax-writing House Ways and Means.

In brief, even as most members admitted to the benefits of working with farmers, they acknowledged serious disadvantages to being an agrarian legislator. Both the short-term politics of back home, embedded amazingly in the past, and the long-term constraints of agricultural establishment institutions and their

Washington agricultural policy domain cause difficulties. The degree to which legislators put up with both and often accord them great respect, however, show the sustaining power of rules and rulemaking over personal preferences. In the Congress, despite procedural criticism and considerable sympathy for rural needs, the prospects for rural policy reform, as opposed to marginal and symbolic drift, remain few. It is not something that commands attention and creates incentives for personal action. Disincentives prevail.

Rural advocates, while not foolish in working the Congress, face correspondingly harsh circumstances there. The poor, in particular, are locked between two hard rocks: rural legislators who lack ways to serve their needs, and those from urban areas who fail to appreciate their unique circumstances. It is not, however, a situation that exists because Congress fails to appreciate its own deficiencies. Rather, it is the unique culmination of decades of institution-building on behalf of a select, well-organized, highly-favored, yet hard-to-satisfy farm clientele. Neglect of others is indeed the legacy of institutions constraining personal choice.

#### **EXPLAINING RURAL POLICY FAILURE<sup>8</sup>**

The preceding five sections of this analysis have drawn together five sets of observations that explain the failure of the national government, over time, to respond to the rural poor, or even to the collective needs of rural communities. Because the reasons for policy failure are complex in their relationship to one another, no single set is sufficient for drawing conclusions. For example, blaming extant institutions without considering their evolutionary context misses the point. It does no good to impose contemporary values on decisions made in an era guided by wholly different considerations.

#### **The Foundation of Institutions**

The earlier sections pieced together the following scenario. Institutional arrangements mattered, yet they came into being through fundamental cultural values and their linkages with social structure. Values and structure were all the more powerful in that they merged prescriptions for democratic rulemaking with normative aspects of an especially productive and socially useful agrarian lifestyle. It was not simply about farming. Such was the importance of myth as it reflected American political thought. Values and structures also were reinforced by a pervasive natural resource concern: food and its potential for maintaining a large and growing nation. The agricultural development paradigm was born in consequence--not easily, but understandably. The constraining laissez-faire (yet democratic) rules of the political economy--which created difficulty for (but still fostered) modernization/development policy, indeed holding it back (but never weakening its driving forces) until the Civil War--made doing anything more for rural residents unlikely. The U.S. Constitution set forth few responsibilities for government, operating under basic principles of limited, not interventionist, rule. What firmed institutional support and provided lasting policy direction for agricultural development was the degree to which values of democratic rule, the structure of a farm society, and the natural resource conditions of the country were compatible with one another, and in theory, limited rule. It was their interactive efforts that provided extraordinarily stable policy circumstances (for a related policy model, see Sabatier, 1988,1991).

These circumstances proved to be so stable in their interrelationships that institution-building in agriculture was as unique to politics as were the circumstances of the farm sector to the economy. In fact, uniqueness of the institutions and the sector provided their linkage. As chronic crop surpluses

persisted and kept farm incomes low, the need for continuing assistance, first technological and then political, was evident to those within the agricultural community. As a result, socio-economic events provided a gigantic boost to agrarianism and its modernization, creating public organizations and private advocacy groups as a common core to an agricultural establishment. With the institutionalization of that establishment, the agricultural modernization/development paradigm became, along with elements of limited government and democratic principles, the essential rules of the game governing the farm sector and, by implication, rural places.

But modernization/development rules, when in competition with those of limited government and democratic participation, won out. Or more specifically, they came to reign supreme in the sense that, when powers were shared, the dictates of modernization/development were more empowered than the rest. Limited rule obviously was cast aside as the agricultural establishment took on increasing policy responsibilities. Nonetheless, there were critical restraints still imposed by limited rule. Agricultural organizations, both public and private, demanded more, especially with the crisis of the Great Depression. The Depression served as a catalyst to events which shifted the provision of collective policy benefits firmly and finally to ones selectively received by specific beneficiaries. This shift, while major and a cause of increasing farm influence, was still consistent with the modernization/development paradigm and the policies that distributed rewards to farm sector participants. The establishment, however, did not act on behalf of those affected downstream--that is, those left behind by the modernization and technological adaptation of farming. To do so would have entailed policy redistribution. Establishment resources necessarily would have been redirected away from farmers to those who

either had fallen out or were involved in less publicly-supported endeavors (see also Lowi for policy types, 1964b, 1972).

While rules of limited government were eased, so too were democratic rules of majoritarianism. Doing policy work for a majority did not win out, even though the origins of farm policy were ones inherent to an agrarian nation. There was a shift to a minority strategy. The agricultural establishment, not unlike the representatives of other economic sectors, formulated political tactics that were intended to overcome the always tedious and difficult politics of majority rule in a two-party system. It was designed to win even with declining numbers of farm and rural residents. Those efforts by agrarians gave rise to the much maligned policy network that concentrated the efforts of numerous Washington players, the following shift of increased power to the already important keystone committees in Congress, and, eventually, to the definition of appropriate issues for a policy domain. This institutionalized the purpose of agriculture and rural policy--that is, the rules of agricultural modernization/development--within a Washington establishment. That establishment, of course, was distinct from but included overlapping Washington-based components of the agricultural establishment. The existence of both, following in agriculture the same policy rules, had considerable importance for structuring contemporary politics.

Policy essentially was driven from there in two directions, a point agricultural policy observers constantly missed. One direction, reflecting fears of minority status and appealing to urban legislators, was the commonly observed one of broadening the agricultural policy agenda to encompass consumer issues, food safety, nutrition, trade, conservation, global warming, and the like. Issues of that sort were necessary policy additions under democratic rules of

majoritarianism. But, as was found, most of these became peripheral concerns of congressional business and interest group advocacy. They did not substantially alter the direction or nature of agricultural and rural policy.

The second direction, the one overlooked, was to firm up support politically for the institutions of agricultural development. Those, as explained, stayed the heartland issues that commanded priority attention in Congress. Such issues had sustaining power because the associative state had created in agricultural and rural policy a symbiotic relationship between farmers and government, not to mention related ties to agribusiness. Thus, the issues, which were legitimated by continuing decline in farm numbers would not go away. Farm advocates, even with diverse wants and points of view, were encapsuled in both the agricultural and Washington establishments as accepted and credible players. That is, they were accepted as long as they championed modernization/development or their actions were consistent with it. There were neither sufficient programs nor enough attentive members of Congress to provide momentum for any lobby that followed an alternative logic, either farm or rural.

With farm advocacy institutionalized at the grassroots and in Washington, and with domain rules determining acceptable policy purposes, a reactive Congress continued into the present with a plethora of unmistakable -- though still debatable -- farm policy cues. Members followed them well. It really meant very little that the farm population was shrinking, since Congress collectively still understood its job to be providing first for an extremely important economic (food and fiber) sector that, with its farm base, usually accounted for around 20 percent of Gross National Product.<sup>9</sup> Good policy, even if allocating actual benefits to an incredibly small number of farmers, could hardly be judged to be sound in Washington if such policy threatened to ruin sector relationships and

bring about uncertain economic consequences.

Furthermore, a home style image could hardly be seen as appropriate to a district or state if the congressperson who projected it failed to defend, as he or she did every other respected and vocal minority, even the smallest number of surviving farmers. Important social values of local communities thus merged with the district job of the congressional member to reinforce commitment to farmers. Into the 1990s, even as subjected to great changes in social structure, institutional arrangements at home and in Washington militated against reforms and any redistribution of farm policy benefits. Institutions of the past were a trap. While a slow erosion of the agricultural policy budget gained acceptance in Congress, absolutely nothing, especially no abetted advocacy coalition or groups, supported any transfer of dollars to the rural problems of disadvantaged communities and people. Quite tellingly, no legislator emerged in Congress to build a reputation as a proponent of rural places, let alone their poorest people. Whatever rural policy the Congress passed was long in symbolic form but short in substance for nonfarm residents.

### **Explaining Institutional Capture**

This entire analysis has been about the complexities of institutional capture of public policy. As such, it was written as a reaction to an overwhelming tendency by political observers to oversimplify causality in public policy. Many explanations have reduced government neglect of the poor, rural or otherwise, to partial truths. As a consequence, their banality confuses cause, effect, and prescription. From such explanations, several cures gained prominence: ban political action committees (PACs) to reduce farm power, dismantle farm price support programs, organize a national rural advocacy coalition; do more rural based research, expose falsehoods; encourage social

awareness among the rural poor; reorganize USDA and the land-grant universities; get members of Congress out of Washington and make them see rural problems first-hand. While none of these either were or should be dismissed, all fail as simple prescriptions for correcting rural inequities.

Inequities in the balance between farm and rural public policy benefits, to be addressed effectively, must be understood as ingrained in organizations, rules, and rulemaking procedures that were created quite rationally over time (Eggertsson, 1990). The structure of these institutions induced a policy equilibrium that, because of their collective strength and continued believability, survived social and political changes. What happened in agricultural institution-building and the process it set in motion followed a logical sequence of policy moves. Certain individuals at each stage were given positions of privilege, either as policymakers or recipients, often as both. Because the resulting policy paradigm, agricultural modernization/development, was reinforced at each stage, policy neutrality of the players declined, and one policy approach became all but invulnerable to alternatives (see Shepsle, 1986, 1989b). It was all but renegotiation-proof. As Shepsle and Weingast (1981, 1987a, 1987b) observed for the Congress, structure-induced equilibrium provided institutions that, as seen throughout these two chapters as well, were not driven by individually-selected preferences. Driving forces for this equilibrium in farm and rural policy were (1) development of the human capital needed by farmers to modernize, (2) the creation of manmade capital with its intensive resource investment, (3) technology, and (4) the change and maintenance needs of the institutions (Johnson et al, 1991). Basic questions of farm policy, its direction, and the issues that individuals would prioritize in surrounding policy debates all were quite constrained, and really not bargainable. What was true



for the Congress was true also for every other rulemaking organization. Organized entities, and those who operated them, bent but little to other socially-valued rules, and then only to protect their own well-accepted credibility on central questions of modernization/development.

As a consequence, anyone who argued for counter-advocacy on behalf of rural problems made little difference. Without active institutional consideration of policy choices, there was no basis for the political exchanges that moved politics. Organizers, who attempted to create interest groups, had very little to offer supporters (Olsen, 1965; Salisbury, 1969). If sympathetic to the rural poor, organizers were better off bringing together home builders and construction firms, who would use public funding to house them through FmHA. When organized, groups representing the rural poor had little to offer legislators (Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, 1963; Hayes, 1981: 17-18; Browne, 1988, 1990). Members of Congress, without a reasonable chance for legislation, really had no need for either information on rural conditions or for mobilizing support. Advocating on behalf of permanent status for food stamps, however, was more effective, catching the attention of legislators who previously had not been attracted to key features of farm bills. Only exchanges worthwhile to both parties--organizers and supporters, or lobbyists and legislators--were transacted.

What was learned over time was a single lesson about the complexities of farm and rural politics. Any serious proposal that altered but one institutional piece without changing several essential relationships failed to redistribute policy rewards. Legislators, with an unwieldy number of changes facing them, did not pass in Washington what they observed of rural poverty in Mississippi (Kotz, 1971). Nor, if farm groups were to lose their PAC money in the future, would government desert the modernization/development of U.S. agriculture. And a Rural

Development Administration, if organized, would not reallocate, by necessity alone, farm program appropriations its way. In the largest sense, such actions were and will be merely cosmetic, ones again of form without substance for the rural disadvantaged.

Why, however, was the neglect of rural policy so clouded by obfuscation? Reading through time into the hearts and minds of policy participants was precluded for this study, of course. People left few telling documents to clear this point, leaving only their myths behind. Yet lasting evidence in the form of both recent actions by interested groups and the attitudes and behavior of legislators suggest that, through use of agrarian myths, suppression of both policy intent and results was intentional, or just as strategic as the evolution of network politics. To further their own goals, as noted in earlier pages, it was sensible for lobbyists and legislators to merge farm and rural policies in the public's mind, even when the latter failed because of the former. Farm representatives did not want rural to be seen as distinct; they won legislatively because of some purposely vague link between the two. Even jurisdictional erosion of some rural issues away from congressional agriculture committees still kept the linkage legitimate in legislative rules. Given other lasting features and characteristics of the agricultural establishment, that tendency toward purposeful obscurity was likely an early one rather than anything newly symptomatic of U.S. politics. Certainly expressions of concern about people falling out of farming, and neglect of what to do about them, were part of public policies discussions since at least the Country Life Commission hearings.

Can more about institutional capture be inferred? Public choice theorists, by focusing on often unobservable yet rational acts that explain other critical findings, suggest that more can be deduced. Sociologists, political scientists,

and economists have all examined institutions as sets of multiple-person games that restrict certain outcomes while favoring others, especially in developing theories of the firm (Johnson et al, 1991). Each of their analyses appear consistent with what was portrayed in this work as institutionally-determined farm policy capture of the direction of rural policy. Yet the premises of public choice theory also offer additional insight, especially in explaining why change was and is so improbable.

All organizational entities, or firms, have practiced their business with limited information. This was not always a disadvantage. Oftentimes this lack of knowledge, both of its own awareness and of others about it, proved advantageous to satisfying the organization. Even a lack of knowledge of policy outcomes was not necessarily a disaster. Far from it. In agriculture, new policy discoveries, even failures, provided ex ante opportunities, as seen in the book's earlier chapter on institutional policy failure, to put new rules in place as needed. Moreover, successful farmers could always be pointed out as de facto proof of important policy successes as reasons to add still improved rules. Of course, the agricultural establishment gained greater institutional strength, and farmers collectively gained more political power, as this rulemaking process escalated. The linkages, or the interconnectiveness--both within the agricultural establishment and with a Washington establishment--were strengthened as well by imperfect knowledge. All participants had to rely more on trust of one another than on systematic evaluation of one another's work. Of course, society, including farmers, had to trust them all, despite observations to the contrary as farm losses continued.

Indeed, the fact that farmers produced their commodities under natural conditions of uncertainty provided a rulemaking base as well as a justification

as to why agricultural modernization/development never reached its promised potential. Policymakers and administrators always were left with the need to do more, not start the search for alternatives. This also was opportune. Without continued failure by some farmers, which increased perceptions of risk and dependency, it may well have been that the opportunities for an enhanced institutional establishment and for farm power would have been diminished. The message of risk, of course, was inherent in the agrarian myth of the struggling farmer who received less for his investment than did those in other economic sectors. It implied the specter of pending doom, and the corresponding need for public policy intervention to ward it off.

Again, applications of public choice theories of the firm provide insight into what transpired in the construction of this myth. Transaction costs were at work; these were the costs of securing more information, negotiating agreements on common actions across institutions, and enforcing any new agreements (Johnson, 1988). As numerous analyses have shown, high transaction costs retard change regardless of setting (Coase, 1937; Moe, 1980; Williamson, 1985; Hechter, 1987; North, 1987, 1990; Bonnen and Browne, 1989; Browne, 1990, 1991). In the case of the dynamics of farm and rural policy, especially with an institutional equilibrium falling into place, transaction costs of change were ominously high. They were already high just for continuing forward movement on modernization/development, let alone offering change. Given the context of laissez-faire government, population decline, and an always defensively-postured farm politics, even moves to a somewhat more equitable balance between farm and rural initiatives would have generated justifiable alarm.

Rules of limited government and majoritarianism loomed large in the event that rules of agricultural development were reduced, either by political losses

or by policy failure on more than just the margins of agriculture. That explained, in and of itself, why rural policy was not considered. It also was the probable explanation for the artfully-constructed parts of the agrarian myth that were used so well to obscure the twin facts that the farm sector and rural places were not the same and that policy gains from farm programs in rural regions were decidedly mixed. Farm policy protection, shrouded in institutional maintenance, thus provided every reason to believe that it worked best under conditions of quite imperfect information, through cynical and purposeful--yet probably never planned--manipulation of social values. One question then remains: Does that conclusion, despite the unrelenting obstacles to change observed throughout this analysis, suggest anything useful, in a positive sense, for rural policy reform in the future? For even in the agriculture policy domain, after all, there have been consequential policy changes that were not simply policy add-ons (Benedict, 1942, 1950; Reichelderfer and Hinkle, 1989). Legislators, as they explained in the last section, certainly saw environmental legislation as one such example. Does success there, because of its recent importance, offer suggestions?

#### **Why Environmentalism Worked, Or at Least Got in the Farm Policy Door**

Public policy efforts to bring about environmentally-sound farm production practices stand in contrast to rural policy, and they have since at least the Great Depression. Of course, because the institutionalization of agricultural modernization/development touched everything within the agricultural establishment, environmental initiatives were captured at least somewhat similarly by farm sector concerns. Moreover, despite gains in the farm bills of 1985 and 1990, environmental initiatives such as cross-compliance--where soil practices are linked to commodity payments--have not yet escaped linkages to farm

programs, nor have they achieved levels of funding and political support that guaranteed that environmental problems in agriculture would continue to be recognized on their own merits (Bosso, 1987). Nonetheless, given considerable legislative support for abetting the demands of environmentalists, a reasonably useful question can still be asked: Where did policy action differ with the handling of rural problems? Three factors were important in explaining the credibility of environmental policy goals.

First, although initial environmental efforts were known as resource conservation, those responsible for conserving soil and water were relatively early and vital parts of the agricultural establishment. Conservation work, especially through the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) but also earlier, became integral to USDA, land-grant education, extension work, and the experiment stations. As soon as it became evident that questions of natural resource use were inseparable parts of farm economics, an institutional base for environmentalism existed within the agricultural establishment. Its employees and proponents, in keeping with the sense of agrarian myths, believed that they were fostering the rational acts of farm stewardship. Because farming by definition was bending nature's tendencies to human will, many of the destructive forces of production were visible to practitioners and experts alike. Awareness of causality, replete with some knowledge of the scope of the problems, brought intense policy responses under the Dust Bowl and drought conditions of the 1930s.

While the politics of the next 60 years was most extraordinarily trying, with even the Extension Service resisting efforts to organize SCS at the grassroots, conservation policy proved at least as legitimate as price intervention for USDA. There was not the same emphasis and investment, however.

Yet conservation was not, as was rural policy, felt irrelevant or untimely. In fact, as new problems of environmental degradation associated with farm production were discovered, often through agricultural institutions, expansive demand for action was generated. Much of that demand was internal as well. Conflict within institutions was intense, as charges were leveled by numerous agriculturalists that identifiable problems were neglected in systematic and often willful fashion (Hadwiger, 1982). Whole organizational units changed in response. Rules were promulgated in attempts to safeguard against experts and administrators being coopted by those threatened by new environmental efforts. In that sense, agrarian institutions proved adaptive to environmental problems in ways that they had not for nonfarm rural problems. Organizations, particularly those engaged in research, were unable to go back.

The inability of organizations to retreat on environmental issues was structured by the two other factors that created differences between rural and environmental programs: policy linkage and the bases of advocacy. Environmental and conservation programs were examples that took land out of production for both economic and natural resources reasons. Also, the creation of SCS within USDA from the old Soil Erosion Service was the result of Depression Era perceptions that linked the need for the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 with soil erosion controls.

Nonetheless, conservation and later environmental goals usually were articulated as distinct from those of farm production, and as different parts of the farm income dilemma. Independent status allowed separate organizations and rules, most notably SCS and the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP), to develop even though they retained "farmer first" principles. Moreover, by giving ACP responsibilities to local USDA offices and their farmer-composed management

committees, conservation was taken as an item in its own right to the grassroots. Even while the conservation value of many decisions was questionable, farm advocacy developed on behalf of natural resource policy.

While farm involvement and advocacy further legitimated conservation and environmental programs, those were not the organized interests responsible for creating one of the two biggest changes yet seen in the dynamics of contemporary agricultural and rural politics. Environmentalists, through both patron support and mass membership organizations, became influential players in ways that rural interests could not. There were several environmental groups, each with specific demands about food production, processing, and use. While maintaining their own issue agendas, they met together and operated under a coalition banner that intimidated opponents. Most importantly, from a congressional perspective, they represented together an identifiable social movement with a large following of upper- and middle-income voters (Milbrath, 1984). Furthermore, many of the advocacy groups spent the greatest time and money, not in Washington, but in generating public awareness and further financial contributions back home.

The conditions under which environmental groups operated also were distinct from those that restrained rural advocates. Many environmental groups and activists were experienced in other policy domains, and they had records of achieving success in the regulation and modification of business and government practices. They had won, in some cases, major program gains that enforced cooperation with those seen as environmental adversaries. Some of those specific victories, such as on the Clean Water Act, gave them credible entry--and formidable reputations--within agricultural and rural policy. Those reputations, gained through success, were unencumbered in the public's mind with any negative appearance of suddenly having been organized to attack farmers. They benefitted



from the perception that they simply acted against risks to the public wherever public interest activists found them. So, in terms of public images, environmentalists were forces of good, able to challenge anything potentially harmful in the relationship between land and food. As a result, they could legitimately, at least in the eyes of many risk-averse policymakers, raise questions of propriety that placed the burden of safety and proof on farmers and agribusinesses. Thus, they--and not, in this instance, farmers--were the beneficiaries of the use of imperfect knowledge. All of that combined to lend them the policy advantages of media appeal, a cadre of strong and abetting legislative proponents, and at least grudging support elsewhere in Congress. With such strength, these outside advocates reinforced the pro-environmental views that existed already within many agricultural organizations.

But are there lessons in environmentalism for rural policy? Rural advocacy of that dimension was, and is, unimaginable. And there were precious few individuals ever added to the agricultural establishment who took on values as rural guardians or watchdogs. Not even a redefinition of role could get most of these people away from a farm sector to a rural places orientation--a shift and transaction cost that on environmental issues was unnecessary. Environmental problems, like conservation programs, were sector-based, even though most production consequences were off-farm costs.

### **Prescription and Projection**

The lesson of environmental policy in agriculture is that rural policy reform lies not in imitation. If it is ever to come, factors producing reform will be necessarily unique, somehow tied to a dramatic change in farm policy but not necessarily the decline of the agricultural modernization/development

paradigm. Since the second of the two most dramatic changes in the politics of agriculture, along with environmentalism, is tied to the combined effects of increasing international agricultural interdependence, trade agreements, and the reduction in subsidies to farmers, this shift opens institutional possibilities. If price policies are to fall in the future, there may well be in the federal budget a farm policy dividend. But the agricultural establishment, bereft of many present responsibilities, would be forced to fight improbably hard for a rural share of that dividend. Limited government has reasserted itself in calls for lower taxes and fewer government expenditures; democratic majorities have strengthened their urban base, rural policy and the development paradigm have not been reconciled, rural advocates show no potential for growth, and Congress demonstrates no capacity to think on its own about rural places.

So rural communities and the rural poor, still without real institutional support, likely will be left without public policy gains well into the future. Their only relief will come in specific rural places that get exceptional levels of public support for reasons other than local need. Or they will be found where nonspecifically rural programs, such as those to promote tourism, inequitably provide trickle-down benefits. These bleak prospects for change suggest that, for reasons of institutional memory, rural places and people would be served best, but still not adequately, by forever dropping any references to the term "rural policy". That terminology, while accurately identifying problems of plentiful space and low population density, hopelessly confuses policy intention. Just call it "regional policy", move it away from the agricultural policy domain, and keep it independent of the farm sector. Given the drag of institutions, there are no other public choices for either the benefit of the rural disadvantaged or for the lowering of transaction costs for those who would

represent them.

## NOTES (2)

1. Patrons also can be individuals as well as organizations.
2. These conclusions result from my 1985-86 lobbyist interviews as well as subsequent lobbyist interviews in 1990-91.
3. The Mississippi Delta Project gained support because it promised specific services and development efforts to a multi-state region, housing several congressional districts and large percentages of poor people. It was an easy project for voter-conscious legislators from both parties to support, bringing in new federal monies to address issues that would not go away for very aggrieved local citizens. Moreover, these legislators log-rolled, giving their support for other programs in return for this one big, rare favor for the Delta.
4. This section is based on responses from a 120 member sample of House (90) and Senate (30) offices from the 101st Congress, 1989-90. Legislators were sampled from three categories: agriculture committees (including appropriations subcommittees), other committees dealing directly with agriculture and rural issues, and members with no committee assignments of either type. Complete interviews were held in 1991 with 112 offices; there also was one partial interview. Multiple respondents were included in several offices: 48 respondents were legislators, 107 were staff personnel with responsibility for agriculture and/or rural issues. Numerous other staff and a few legislators in other offices provided background information.
5. Responses of the legislators will be summarized for key points. Data analysis will be presented in subsequent publications.
6. The only congressional advocates of absolute free market conditions for

agriculture were among these 13.6 percent of respondents. Not all of these opponents were free market advocates, however.

7. This certainly applies far less to very senior members of Congress from safe seats who, in one of their staffer's words, "wouldn't even know how to act in a young member's office."
8. James T. Bonnen deserves special thanks for his help in redrafting this entire analysis. More than that, he deserves credit for helping develop over time a great many of the ideas used in my work, from agrarian myths to transaction costs. Any comments I might ever make on policy failure and reform will bear his contribution.
9. That percentage fell to 15.4 percent in 1990. Information provided by Jerry Schluter, Economic Research Service, USDA.

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