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UNTIL 4:00 P.M., CST
(5:00 P.M., EST)

March 11, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED AT A
FARM FORUM
CLOCK TOWER INN
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Rockford and in the great State of Illinois this afternoon.

I enjoyed myself so much last weekend -- I just couldn't resist coming back.

I want to take as many of your questions as possible, but let me make one or two brief comments first about where we stand in agriculture.

Last week in Springfield, I outlined my agricultural policies in some detail. Let me summarize them now:

I am firmly opposed to the government holding your reserves in a government bin or warehouse.

I am firmly opposed to a government board selling your exports. I want our export trade to stay in private hands.

I am firmly opposed to any international reserve that would put your farm products under the control of an international body where this country could be out-voted by fifty to one -- or even by one hundred to one.

I am firmly opposed to subsidized imports. I don't want American farmers competing against the treasuries of foreign governments.

I am in favor of productivity and prosperity on the farms of America.

Over the last two years, net farm income has risen to the highest levels in America's history.

That outstanding record is due to two things.

First of all, it's due to some very hard work on the part of the farmers of Illinois and those in other agricultural states.

And second, we've let the farmer rely on the marketplace, rather than depend on the government.

This new freedom, with its competition, its incentives, and its capacity for expansion and flexibility, has worked -- both to the farmer's benefit and to the benefit of our overall agricultural strength and economic growth.

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I oppose any policy that would once again have the farmer producing for government storage, and a government check, on the the government's terms.

My policy is to let the government govern, and let the farmer farm, and let the people benefit.

That policy has worked wonders in the past few years, and we can make it succeed just as well in the future.

The American farmer's market today reaches to the far corners of the world.

The American farmer exported a record 21.6 billion dollars in agricultural products last year -- nearly 2 billion dollars worth from right here in Illinois.

This year, we are selling 6.8 billion dollars worth of agricultural products to western Europe, 3.2 billion dollars worth to Japan, 2 billion dollars worth to the Soviet Union, and 1.2 billion dollars worth to eastern Europe.

We have concluded a long-term agreement for grain sales to the Soviet Union, which calls for the sale of at least 6 million tons of corn and wheat every year between 1976 and 1980.

Because of this and other agreements, your export prospects will no longer be caught in what has been literally a "feast or famine" cycle.

Instead, those prospects will be as steady and as reliable and as profitable as we can make them. Your profits are America's profits, and thanks to you, we are enjoying our best balance of international trade in years.

Foreign agricultural sales thus far in the 1970's are two and a half times greater than they were a decade ago.

All Americans, and millions of people throughout the world, owe the American farmer a special debt of gratitude and plenty of praise for your outstanding record of performance and production, and on their behalf, I thank you most sincerely.

But no one praises you more often, or with more genuine respect and affection, than my Secretary of Agriculture and my good friend, Earl Butz.

As I announced in Springfield last week, I have appointed Secretary Butz as Chairman of my new Cabinet-level Agricultural Policy Committee, which will have the central role in developing and directing our Nation's food policies.

Those policies must guarantee a fair price for the farmer, a fair share of international trade, and a fair shake for everybody.

Earl Butz has said countless times that the American farmer is "the miracle man of the 20th century." I couldn't agree with him more, and I think it's time farmers got as much out of their work as they put into it.

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The American farmer is more efficient, more skilled, more advanced, and more productive than any other farmer in any other nation of the world.

Earlier in this century, the American farmer seemed to be a vanishing breed. For too long, migration from America's farms and fields threatened to leave rural America in decay and in poverty.

I am glad to see that confidence has returned to our rural areas, that more young people are coming into agriculture, and that the enrollments in our agricultural colleges are running at an all-time high.

To further encourage the revitalization of rural America, I have proposed an increase in the estate-tax exemption from 60,000 to 150,000 dollars.

This is in addition to my earlier proposal that the Congress act to stretch out estate tax payments, at greatly reduced interest rates, over a 25-year period.

This dual relief will help save the American family farm, which has always been one of the basic elements in our free American society. We must preserve it for our children and their children.

From the rural beginnings of America 200 years ago, poets, painters and politicians have celebrated the virtues of the American farmer.

In this era the American farmer remains our Nation's greatest natural resource. I am confident that as long as American agriculture remains strong, America herself will be strong and free and prosperous.

Now I will be glad to respond to any questions you may have.

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