

The farm scene . . .

Bergland appearance to help Idaho farms

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

BOISE — The appearance of Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland here Saturday can't help but boost the Idaho farm posture.

Bergland, himself a dirt farmer operating a 600-acre farm in Minnesota, and a former congressman, showed a ready sense of humor, but also one who isn't about to be stampeded by what he feels could become exorbitant demands by some farmers.

While fielding questions at a shirt-sleeve conference attended by some 500 farmers, he defended protesting farmers for their right to dissent, but he acknowledged the rowdy behavior of some did not exactly help their public image in Washington D.C.

Their tractors caused some half million dollars damage to the Washington mall and their caravans tied up travelers for hours.

Bergland deplored the national press playing up the controversy, adding the constructive presentations by delegations were played down.

He teamed up with Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, in agreeing that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which Church now heads, will become an important force in international farm agreements. The international sugar legislation now pending in the committee, for example, is an excellent example.

Both Bergland and Church agreed normalizing relations with China could open a vast agricultural market for American farmers.

Referring to China, he said the Chinese want to pay for goods in cash, even though they are poor. If the Chinese were to eat an additional pound of pork or chicken each year, it would take an additional 100 million bushels of feed to raise the hogs and poultry. Trade with China totals about seven billion bushels annually, much coming from the Pacific Northwest.

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The political pulse

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Bergland noted that last year this country shipped 122 million tons of goods valued at \$27 billion. Idaho farmers exported \$245 million in farm products.

Bergland said, in answer to a question, that Church can help bring peace by building a civilized foreign trade policy. He added Church will be in a position, like perhaps no one in history, to devise a foreign policy for peaceful purposes. He added such a foreign policy could mean hundreds of millions of dollars for Idaho.

Bergland was touched by the presentation of a check by Doug Jones, president of the Twin Falls Farm Bureau, to help pay for repair of the damages caused to the Washington Mall by protesting farmers on tractors.

Jones said it was only a gesture to spur contributions by farmers, telling Bergland "We want you to know that all farmers aren't like the ones appearing in Washington."

Bergland indicated sympathy for Idaho potato and sugar beet farmers, saying the potato diversion and sugar beet support programs would help but admitted they fall far short of bringing prosperity.

He did show a readiness, however, to listen to the plight of farmers and indicated he would support programs that would bring reasonable profits.

He did not back away from a statement that some farmers — a minority — were greedy, and indicated he would not be stampeded by them.

Bergland agreed that not all sectors of America agriculture were successful in selling their crops but added he had to deal with "averages generated by U.S. Department of Agriculture studies."

He said the American Agriculture Movement group in Washington consisted of Western pump irrigators faced with declining water supplies and higher pumping costs; farmers who had made bad judgments on investments or management; and "a few driven by good old-fashioned greed."

Bergland acknowledged potato farmers are in trouble. The USDA's \$18 million diversion program has had only a small effect on prices.

In an exclusive interview he told this writer that other steps may need to be taken if the potato prices don't rise to profitable levels but this would only be as a last resort, and could mean another potato diversion program.

Pictures Reverse Side

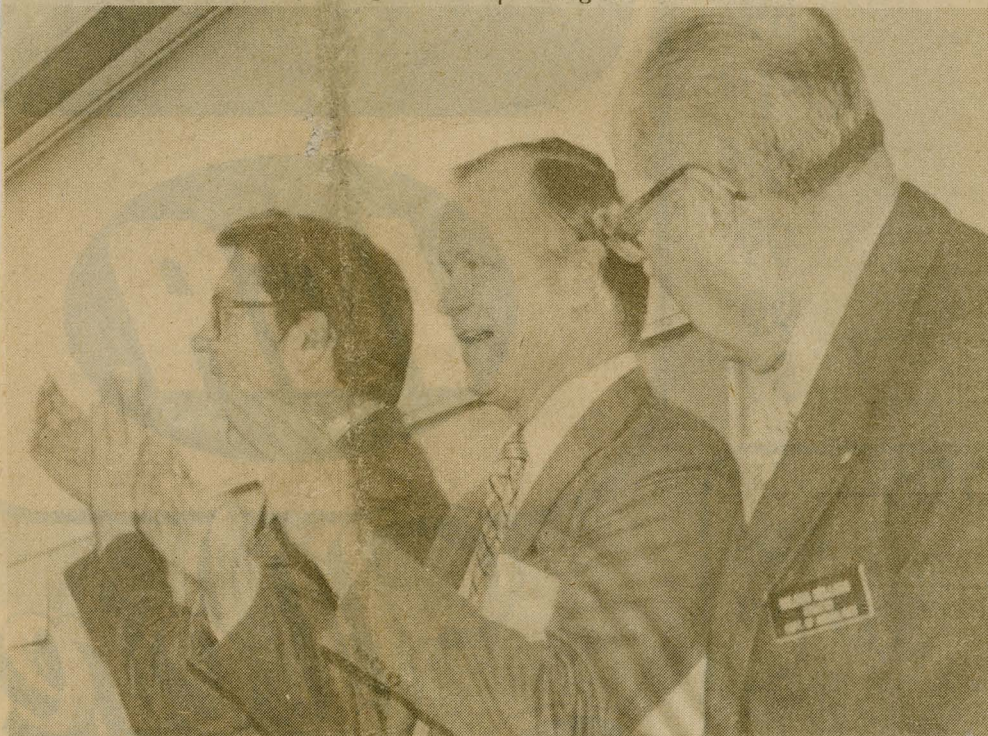


Post-Register photo

Boost for Idaho *Feb. 29, 1997*

BOISE— Seated at the head table at the annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner Saturday night are from left U.S. Sen. Frank Church, Lola Evans, wife of Idaho Gov. John V. Evans; Secretary of Agriculture

Robert Bergland, and Evans. The role of American agriculture in the foreign field was underscored in talks by Church, Bergland and Evans at the banquet, and during earlier interviews.



Post-Register photo

Cheers for farmers

BOISE — Fielding questions at a “shirt sleeve” workshop with some 500 farmers at Boise late Saturday afternoon were from left, Idaho Gov. John V. Evans, Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland and Idaho Commissioner of Agriculture Wilson

Kellogg. They are cheering Doug Jones, president of the Twin Falls Farm Bureau, who submitted a check to help pay for damages caused to the Washington mall recently by protesting farmers on tractors.