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SECOND SESSION

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REVIEW OF THE SODBUSTER AND SWAMPBUS- TER PROVISIONS OF THE FOOD SECURITY ACT OF 1985 AND DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN MINNESOTA AND UPPER MIDWEST

FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 1988

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Moorhead, MN.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:41 a.m., in the Alpine Room, Day's Inn, 600 30th Avenue S., Moorhead, MN, Hon. E (Kika) de la Garza (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Stenholm and Stangeland.

Staff present: James R. Lyons and Paulette Zakrzewski.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. E (KIKI) de la GARZA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

The CHAIRMAN. Before we begin with the formal part of the hearing, and we make our statements for the record, let me thank Congressman Stangeland for inviting us here. All who have participated in making the arrangements, the Moorhead Chamber of Commerce, with representatives we had breakfast with earlier this morning, and the farmers, and ranchers, and businessmen of the area that will be here, let me also state that this is a formal hearing of the committee.

The normal rules will apply. I do not know that there is any problem with that, but one of the areas that would help us expedite the process is that there be no outward demonstrations, if you agree with a speaker, do not agree, no applauding, or booing the speakers, as we proceed with the formal part of the hearing.

Let me say that I have a statement for the record, but I will submit it for the record. This is a little bit odd that the original intent of coming here—we have had to postpone it several times—there was much concern with the sodbuster legislation, swampbuster legislation, and we were coming to visit with members of the community about this legislation and its implementation. And our first two witnesses this morning, Mr. Scaling, Chief of the Soil Conservation Service, and Mr. Hertz, the Administrator of the ASCS office, are here, and they will discuss those issues in depth.

As the time passed on we now find ourselves with a drought situation, the extent of which we do not know yet. But already it has caused problems for many livestock producers, many commodity producers, and what the future holds only the good Lord knows.

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What we feel is our responsibility is to monitor, to the extent possible, so that we are up-to-date daily on the situation. The Agriculture Committee, I as chairman and all its members, are in almost daily contact with the Secretary of Agriculture and with members of the administration. I must give due credit to the Secretary of Agriculture, Dick Lyng, who started way back in March looking at the situation when they were seeing a shortfall of the snow mass up in the Northwest. Fortunately that worked out. But he had a task force in place back then, and now it has been extended and we are working with them.

The Senate has a task force, and we in the House have a task force. We are in contact daily and meeting formally in open session every week. We had met the day before yesterday, and we reached agreement on some general principles of what would be the responsibility of the task force.

I would like to state that those principles are in part: that we maintain the strength of the economy and the rural communities, that we assure that there be no reduced income to agriculture, and that we assure to the extent that Government can, and we can, that there be no great harm done to the American consumer. So we begin with a consumer, we continue with a farmer and rancher, and with the economies in rural communities. That is our concern, and that is our responsibility, and we will continue to do that. That is the reason why we are here.

Now it is not limited to swampbuster, sodbuster, and/or the drought situation, but any other matter related to agriculture that any of you here, through the ones that will represent you as witnesses, wish to bring up or to our attention. You are welcome to do so.

So I thank all of you again. The drought situation only the good Lord knows. But the best thing we need is a good rain throughout the areas where it is needed. But it may yet be too late for some even though the rains come. That is where we need to formulate not policy, but to add to existing policy any corrections we may need to do administratively through the Department of Agriculture, or through the Congress if necessary.

So far the original impact has been on livestock industry. There is already in place, administratively, assistance: haying or grazing on set-aside acres, haying on Conservation Reserve Program acreage, low-cost availability of feed from CCC stocks, the availability of assistance for purchasing feed for livestock—livestock is not limited to cattle, but includes sheep and goats, and all livestock.

Several other items I am interested in: It does not have to be a Governor disaster declaration, or Secretary disaster declaration. It just goes into action by county at the request of the local ASC committee and office for the region to Washington. We have a commitment from the Secretary of Agriculture that they will handle them within 24 hours. I think basically all in dire need have already availed themselves. There are some 1,000 plus counties already approved for that activity throughout the Nation. So that is what is in place now.

As far as the prospective crops, we know that some have already lost their crop. We do not know yet the final outcome for all crops, for all areas, and that is the reason we are here. Our colleague,