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South Carolina Agriculture as a Business

Strom Thurmond

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here on this occasion. Having been born and reared on a farm and taught agriculture in the public schools of the State and farmed myself, I have always been vitally interested in farming.

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of South Carolina. 40% of the people of this State make their living farming. The future destiny of our State depends to a large measure on a sound agricultural economy.

A few years ago South Carolina was primarily a one crop State, but I am glad today that we are more diversified. While last year cotton still brought more money to the farmers than any other one crop, 140 million dollars, there were other important sources of farm income. Tobacco produced in our State brought 73 million dollars, hogs, beef cattle and dairy products brought 50 million dollars, poultry and eggs 15 million dollars and turkeys 5 million dollars. Peaches have become a most important crop now. Asparagus, cucumbers and watermelons have also attained positions of importance.

The dairy and beef cattle business is assuming greater proportions every day.

There is a great opportunity in this State for this phase of agriculture. Not only
do we have lands well adapted to pasture, but we have markets for dairy products.

Our State has been importing tremendous amounts of dairy products for a number of years. 80% of the commercial manufactured butter and 85% of evaporated and condensed milk used in South Carolina comes from without the State. All powdered milk and all the cheese we use in this State have been coming from other places. 90% of the milk, butter, sweet cream, powdered and evaporated milk used in the manufacture of ice cream comes from elsewhere. Even 15% of the bottle milk, the dairy product which brings the highest price, comes from other States. Almost 1/3 of the farm families in South Carolina have no cow. The consumption of milk in this State is less than 1/2 pint per day per person, and we all know that the nutrition experts recommend that adults drink at least one pint a day and children a quart, so it is apparent that the dairy market in this State is bright.

A few years ago it was the general impression that a person who was not educated or trained could at least make a living farming. Today the situation is different, and farming requires much skill. Our farmers today are confronted with intricate problems. The matter of controlling insects/ diseases which are now costing South Carolina 50 million dollars annually is one example. The question of soil conservation, fertilizing, selection of breeds and varieties, controlling obnoxious weeds, are other problems that must be met and solved by the farmer.
Then, too, the question of labor today is a baffling one. Several years ago labor was cheap, but today it is high. The use of machinery on land where it is adapted is now almost compulsory. One man can take machinery today and cultivate 75 or 100 acres of cotton about as easily as he could tend to 15 acres a few years ago. Our farm boys must be trained to handle this machinery, and we hope opportunity will soon be provided at the Trade Schools which will soon be set up in this State.

In the years past our farmers have only produced raw products on the farm. It is the finished product that requires more skill and produces the highest profit. It is my hope that more of our farmers will begin processing their crops. There is no use for our people to import peaches from California, asparagus from New Jersey, and beans from Kentucky when all of these can not only be produced here but can be canned for home use and also placed on the public market. More canning plants and other processing plants should soon solve the problem. Home and community cold storage plants are serving useful purposes and we need increase their number.

South Carolina is one of the largest users of commercial fertilizer among the States of the Nation. We must encourage our farmers to plant more legume and convert the nitrogen from the air to the soil. Practice strip cropping, terracing, and other soil conservation measures which not only mean better crops immediately but preserving the land for the future.
I am glad that our farmers are being better organized. I would like to encourage them to join the Farm Bureau, the Grange, and other such good farm organizations. Organization is badly needed by them to protect their rights and to assure their receiving a fair income for their crops and for their labor that they have put in the farm.

We need better farm to market roads in South Carolina. I have been conferring with the Highway Department recently, and we are now planning to sell 5 million dollars worth of bonds soon to embark a program for improving farm to market roads. Every farm home should have electricity and a telephone made available if the farmer desires it. Our farmers have suffered inconvenience long enough, and we must do all that we can to better their lot, raise their standard of living, and make of them a happy people.

I am intensely interested in doing everything I can in behalf of the farmers and I want them to know that they have no better friend in South Carolina than their Governor.