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Rural Development Subcommittee
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
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Remarks of U.S. Senator Bob Dole

Mr. Chairman:

I would like to commend you for conducting these hearings to hear views of farm organizations on their priorities for rural development planning. It is well that these organizations should be heard in this subcommittee's deliberations, for we must consider the farmers first in any plan for rural development.

Even at this early state in our proceedings, I have received mail from farmers who have seen media commentaries on our subcommittee's first field hearings; and some of them are fearful that the government rural development program may seek to take over their farmland on a massive scale and develop new cities to accommodate people from problem urban centers. They picture something akin to the experience of the American Indian, when lands were taken out by the federal government and made available for "development" by outsiders.

But this sort of thing is not going to happen. No member of this subcommittee, nor any member of the full Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee, would subject our farmers to any such policy, in the attempt to solve the many problems of urban centers. None the less, we need to provide assurance to our farmers that their interests will be of paramount concern in our rural development programs. And in devising a rural development plan, we should make every effort to assure fair, if not preferential treatment, for our farmers.

It is time the farmers of this nation were allowed to share in the benefits of our prosperous economy in the same manner as the urban population of the nation.

The first and most important consideration in any rural development plan should be: "What will this do to improve the income and living conditions of our farmers. The average income of our farmers

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is about \$5400 per year, which is \$100 less than what many urban welfare lobby groups feel should be the national guaranteed income level.

It is true that farm income for all farmers has risen in the past two years faster than it did from 1961 to 1968. Total income is now more than \$16 billion. But farmers are still leaving their farms in large numbers because the small increase in their net income has not kept pace with increases in the price they have to pay for farm implements, seed, fertilizer, chemicals and other requirements for the production of our nation's food and fiber. The Department of Agriculture reports that while total farm income increased \$1.6 billion during 1970 the cost of production increased \$2 billion, resulting in a per capita average net income for 1970 that was \$39 less than in 1969. Farmers, thus, earn only about 78 per cent as much income as individuals in the non-farm segment of our economy, and in most cases, their hours are longer, and their work is much harder. So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to emphasize the need for this committee to approach rural development from the basis of helping the farmer first --- and assuring that any area or community development be evaluated first in terms of the farmers' needs and rightful expectations.

I look forward to hearing today's testimony of spokesmen for farm organizations, those who can give us a first-hand report on the American farmers' views of rural development.