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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Bertsch, Administrator of the Farmers Home Administration from 1961 to 1969, discusses John F. Kennedy's (JFK) views on agriculture, the successes of the Farmers Home Administration during JFK's presidency, and the tone that JFK set in government, among other issues.

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Howard Bertsch

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Oral History Interview

with

Howard Bertsch
Administrator, Farmers Home Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture

July 9, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Layne R. Beaty

For the John F. Kennedy Library

BEATY: Howard, could you recall your first meeting with John Fitzgerald Kennedy?

BERTSCH: Layne, unfortunately, I never contacted the President personally and directly. My first indirect contact was when I received a cable while in Teheran, Iran, working for the Ford Foundation, sent to me in his behalf asking if I would like to come to Washington and discuss with his representatives a significant appointment with the Department of Agriculture.

BEATY: When was this?

BERTSCH: This was between the time of the election and the time of the inauguration. It must have been in early December 1960. Subsequently, I came to Washington and met with Mr. Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.], representatives of his, and subsequently with Governor Freeman [Orville L. Freeman] who had not yet, of course, taken office as Secretary of Agriculture. And those discussions led to my appointment as Administrator of the Farmers Home Administration.

BEATY: Howard, before we get into some of President Kennedy's feelings and philosophy about what the Farmers Home Administration does and stands for, would you care to speculate on how it was that you happened to be offered this post of leading the agency.

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BERTSCH: That would be presumptuous, I suspect, but I had spent all my professional life from 1934 until 1954 through all the chairs of this organization. I started in 1934 as a county supervisor and by 1954 I was director of the Farm Ownership Loan Division here in Washington. In 1954 I was offered an opportunity by the Ford Foundation to go to Iran, advise the Government of Iran and the Shah of Iran [Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi] on the land reform program which was in the planning stage; advise on the development of an agricultural credit program and on the general rural program. I spent seven years there in that undertaking. I met a great many leaders, not only American leaders, but Asian and Middle Eastern leaders. I suspect that I met more prominent Americans in Iran than I could hope to have met if I had stayed here in the United States. The message got back to Mr. Kennedy's lieutenants that a sound and effective rural development program was underway over there. I think he perhaps related that development to what he hoped would take place with the Farmers Home Administration and its rejuvenation here in the United States, and because of the twenty years I had spent in the organization, it identified me at least as one of the candidates to be considered for the post. And then, I suspect, my enthusiasm for the job, for the opportunity of serving under so dynamic and so gallant a young leader, must have left its impression. This is about the story of my life.

BEATY: This, what you just said there by was of describing President Kennedy, might indicate that you had already formed some impression of the man?

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BERTSCH: By December 1960, I think that all Americans had formed an impression of the man, an impression that came through clearly. So far as my particular concern, which always had been an agricultural concern, I was impressed by the fact that President Kennedy never claimed to have been born in a log cabin. He never claimed to have an agrarian background. But from the moment he came on the national scene he quickly and effectively articulated what seemed to me to be the basic agricultural issues. President Kennedy as a candidate realized that a technological revolution in farming had called for some system of production controls lest farmers destroy each other in the tremendous drive for more and more output. He quickly learned and understood the basic dilemma facing farmers caught up in a situation where they had to buy expensive production items like machinery in the controlled market, yet sell their own output of cotton, corn and wheat they grew on the free market. He understood, I think better than many of our national leaders that grew up on farms, that the accelerating farm crisis—and it

was accelerating in 1960—produced seeds of widespread economic and social trouble, not only for rural areas, but for the entire nation.

He was concerned over this problem, and, characteristically, called very early for position papers, studies and discussions. Papers not to gather dust, but papers to form the basis for action. It seemed to me, and it seemed to many, many Americans, that when President Kennedy identified a problem, he went about seeking the best brains, the best talent, available in the nation, assigned them

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them to this problem, and then used their judgments in the right way at the right time, for the right purpose and usually came out with the right answer, the right answer for America. This was true in the way he handled the problem of agriculture.

BEATY: Howard, may I interrupt? Your first recognition of Senator Kennedy's interest in agricultural things came during this time, after he had been nominated?

BERTSCH: It came during the campaign for the nomination. Of course I was following this campaign from 8,000 miles away. I didn't see much television. I didn't hear much radio. I read the Paris editions of New York newspapers and a few weekly periodicals, but everything that was said about him—all the reporting of his speeches—came through clear. It came through with obvious certainty that this man knew how to seek facts and that he was determined to use those facts in a constructive fashion once he had acquired them.

BEATY: Would you give us your explanation of how Senator Kennedy happened to become interested in agriculture and rural problems when he was representing Massachusetts, almost an urban state, and of course had an urban background personally?

BERTSCH: That he had. However, his mind was keen; it was alert. He knew that many, many times in the past, and in the history of America—he understood the history of America and the world—urban problems had been generated by rural problems. He knew that the relationship between rural and urban America can't be differentiated. He knew that

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much of urban poverty had been spawned in rural America. He knew that the place to solve problems was at the root and not at the flower, and this was an inborn sort of talent that the man had, which I am sure generated from his great, great breadth of understanding what had transpired historically in this nation. This is illustrated by the understanding he had of the central role and of the importance of the family-owned and operated farm in the United States. And he related this to the problems that occurred around the world when an

agriculture not based upon the family-owned and operated farm developed. During his campaign for the presidency in 1960, whenever he spoke on the subject of agriculture, either extemporaneously, or from a prepared text or whenever a position paper was issued in his name, the recurring theme, the trend that ran through all his comments was that we must protect and strengthen the family farm.

For example, in October 1960 his office released a statement titled, "Agricultural Policy for the New Frontier." This statement included the observation and I am quoting it, "that the assurance of a fair return to farmers must include a recognition of the importance of the family farm as an efficient unit of agricultural production as an indispensable social unit of the American rural life and as the economic base for towns and cities in rural areas." This demonstrates that he recognized the relationship between the family farm and the prosperity of towns and cities. Early in the campaign he said that he wanted an administration that would be "sympathetic and understanding toward the farm people of America." During the

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campaign he also recommended programs and policies to strengthen the family farm so it would, as he said, remain the backbone of American agriculture. He said among these policies would be strengthened credit institutions to meet the financing needs of family farmers for housing, for farm production, and for the acquisition or development of family farms.

Layne, it's one thing for a man running for the presidency to take stands, to propose policies, to come out for the good and proper things that no one can quarrel with such as family farming. But the acid test is always performance. This test applied in every major area of national life that the President concerned himself with, and that was essentially every area. In the agricultural sector he not only said the right things while running for office, but he exerted steady and demanding efforts in achieving those things after coming to the presidency. He saw that his brave words were transformed into programs and policies. First of all, he selected vigorous, young liberal activists to run his farm agencies. He selected people whom he knew personally would drive for solutions to complex problems facing American farmers.

For example, he picked Orville Freeman to be the Secretary of Agriculture. The President knew Secretary Freeman's record as Governor of Minnesota. He knew Mr. Freeman had faced some difficult farm problems in his own state, which is among the larger agricultural states in the nation. The President knew that Mr. Freeman was young—he was in his early forties. He knew he was a liberal, an

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activist and fighter. He knew that Secretary Freeman has been a young officer in the Pacific in combat during World War II, and I have no doubt that this fact had some influence on the President's judgment. He wanted somebody, I suspect, who could stand up to the beating which seems to be the lot of every Secretary of Agriculture and to fight back for those programs and policies that agriculture and the whole nation needed—the programs and policies that the President had articulated during his campaign. The work in my own agency,

the Farmers Home Administration was, I can only use the work, “revitalized,” it was rejuvenated, and it was done by President Kennedy. The Farmers Home Administration originally was set up in 1946 to supply credit and management advice for family farmers who couldn’t get a loan from normal credit sources to improve their farming operations. This was an organization of about 5,000 employees, most of them scattered through 1,500 county offices around the nation.

BEATY: This is the same agency that, maybe not, but there was an agency called the Farmers Security Administration earlier?

BERTSCH: Farmers Home is the successor of the Farm Security Administration. The Farm Security Administration was established during the ‘30’s to solve the problems of drought and depression. The Farmers Home Administration grew out of that experience, was created in 1946, or emerged in 1946 as a result of legislative action. During the 1950’s the Farmers Home Administration came upon bad times. The top administration of the agency was permitted to deteriorate pretty badly. Lending programs were cut back. Many farms families that

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really needed credit, and the other assistance this agency had to offer to save their farms, to save their little communities, were turned away. In fact, the only reason FHA survived at all during the period 1953-61, was that certain members of Congress who knew its work the best saw to it that the Administration, at least, kept the agency alive.

All this changed dramatically when President Kennedy and his Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, assumed office. The improvements made in loan programs administered by Farmers Home, the positive, the forward-looking attitude shown by the Secretary of Agriculture and his staff concerning the work of the agency, most of all the favorable administrative climate created by the President and his staff. All these factors converged to produce a remarkable change in the outlook and work of the Farmers Home Administration. Here again, I believe, we have the illustration of how the wonderful articulateness, the brilliant ability of the President to verbalize and to project his ideas, was a prelude to action, not a substitute for action. This, I think, characterizes everything the man stood for. During the 1960 campaign, as I said, Senator Kennedy said he believed in the family farm as an institution and would take steps to reinforce its position in the American agriculture. During his nearly three years in office he authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to move forward on a 101 front with the objective of doing just that, reinforcing the position of family farm agriculture in the nation. The record of the Farmers Home Administration during this time is simply an illustration of what can be said about many

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many other agencies. Let me give you some of the highlights: the President wasn’t in office a month before he had freed some 85 million dollars in loans funds for farm housing loans and for farm operating loans that had been tied up by the previous administration at a time,

February 1961, when the planting season was upon the American farmers, no loan funds were available. Although Congress had appropriated them, the previous administration had kept them in the cold storage. As I said, within 30 days of the Inauguration, these funds were in the hands of farmers.

The qualification requirements for loans to finance farming operations were changed so that the many many small and low-income farmers, for whom this agency was created, would again be benefiting from the Farmers Home program. Quickly a rural areas development program was set up by Secretary Freeman to stimulate economic progress in farming areas. The Farmers Home, along with other agencies of the Department, was assigned responsibility for working with local communities to get the program organized. And it's now active, Layne, in 2,500 counties.

President Kennedy signed the Housing Bill early in 1961 which authorized the Farmers Home Administration to make housing loans not only to farmers but to the vast group of non-farm rural residents, who he described as being the sufferers of a housing gap. This one piece of legislation alone, which was proposed by the President, supported by the President, literally changed the face of entire rural communities where thousands of shacks and substandard dwellings are being replaced by modest but up-to-date comfortable and attractive homes financed by the Farmers Home Administration. Parenthetically, it's an interesting phenomenon how the attitudes of the President can permeate down to the most isolated community in the land and

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touch the lives, even the most obscure of our citizens. Thousands upon thousands of families all over rural America would this day be living in hovels, in shack, in cabins, in substandard dwellings if President Kennedy himself hadn't believed in it hadn't activated this thought, this principle. Always it seems to me, that we must remember that with John F. Kennedy the difference between the development of the sound idea and the implementation of that idea, the activation of it, was only a step away.

But back to the story, in July of 1961 President Kennedy signed an appropriation bill for the Department of Agriculture that provided lending authority for the Farmers Home Administration that was nearly twice the amount provided by the previous budget. And he had previously promoted legislation which made it unnecessary for this agency to go back to the Treasury for these funds, which authorized us to re-loan our collections and to much more effectively utilize these investments of private investors on an insured basis. So this doubling of our capacity to be useful to rural America came at no cost to the American taxpayers. Later that summer he signed an agricultural measure including many of the changes and reforms that he had called for during the campaign of 1960. All our loan programs were overhauled, with the aim of making them more useful, more flexible, more beneficial in service to rural people. As a result of this new legislation and the buoyant, the positive spirit of service that permeated the entire administration of Mr. Kennedy, our organization loaned a record of \$637,000,000 in fiscal 1962. This was a

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100 percent increase over the amount loaned in the last full year of the previous administration. And you know, it was loaned with the same administrative budget that had been used for this agency in 1960. This seems to me to indicate that the American people were getting good government. They were getting \$2.00 worth of service, twice as much service for every administrative dollar spent in 1961, as they did in 1960. This was the kind of government President Kennedy insisted upon the American people getting from its public servants.

BEATY: This has to do with the repayment of the loans. Now how is the, what is the rate of repayment of Farmers Home Administration loans, Howard?

BERTSCH: Farmers and rural people have made a remarkable record in this respect, and it is a great delight to be the instrument, or part of the instrument, by which they demonstrate again their integrity, their willingness, and determination to pay their debts. The losses on Farmers Home Administration loans through the years have been about 8/10 of 1 percent of the amount loaned. Interest collections cumulatively to date are about 14 times the amount written off on loans. But the important point I make is that by some sort of alchemy of great spirit, the President inspired all of us to stand a little taller, all of us to perform a little better, so much better, that in my agency as an example, twice as much productive work was done per man in the first year of his administration as had been done in the last year preceding his inauguration. Then in 1962, you recall, the President signed the second farm bill, The Food and Agriculture Act of 1962. This further broadened our responsibilities

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and opportunities to be useful. And by this time we could see the broad program taking shape. These authorizations were authorizations that permitted us to serve rural people in the form of converting unneeded farmland, farmland unneeded for crop production, into the production of those things for which there was demand. He had repudiated the idea of idling our resources. No nation is so rich, and he understood this, no nation is so rich that it can afford to put its resources aside and depopulate its countryside and leave its resources idle. We have no resources for which there's not some good use; it just takes ingenuity and imagination to identify what the best use of those resources is. And this is just what the Agricultural Act of 1962 led us into doing. For the first time too, that act set up a program of rural renewal, rural adaptation of the great urban renewal programs. And again here was President Kennedy making good on his campaign commitments to build a Great Society in rural America. It was also that year that he signed legislation which authorized broad programs of loans and grants for housing for the elderly in rural areas. That year we also closed the first insured loan to improve housing conditions for farm laborers, another innovation of the Kennedy Administration.

During fiscal 1963, we found that another new record had been set. We made or insured nearly \$800,000,000 in loans to rural people. During that period 227,000 rural

families used the credit of this agency. Just compare this amount and benefits produced by these loans with \$300,000,000 loaned or insured in 1961.

BEATY: Howard, this speaks very eloquently for President Kennedy's attitude on the matter of agricultural problems and rural well-

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being. But now, chances are he didn't think up all the details of these programs alone. Who would you say were his advisers during this period which led to the development of new legislation from time to time that you've just described?

BRETSCH: He used the best, most forward-looking brains in the Congress of the United States. His long experience in Congress had taught him where they were and who they were. Obviously, he used the Secretary of Agriculture in whom he had great confidence and in whom his confidence was certainly well placed. He used the many young men who had been his advisers through the campaign. I think he wanted a continuity. I think he deliberately designed a continuity between what he told the people he stood for in the campaign and what his administration delivered to them after the inauguration. John Baker [John A. Baker], the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, was one of them and obviously there were many, many more. This change that I've described in the Farmers Home administration would have been simply unthinkable without a President in the White House who knew exactly how much needed to be done in rural America.

As you pointed out, he didn't specify the details, but he painted the picture so clearly, he painted the needs so clearly, and he inspired all of us who were working under his direction with the importance of action. He had the vision and he could articulate the plans and the programs. And, again I repeat, what was perhaps most important, was his determination to translate all these plans and programs into

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action. As I pointed out, this was certainly true of my agency in its experience and I'm sure it was true—virtually true—of all the agencies which make up the Federal Government. I don't think any of us administrators, implementers of programs, I don't think any of us was not, in some way, moved and affected almost directly by the President. But over and above the issues of policies and programs and administration, the presence of a person like President Kennedy in the White House had a tonic effect. For example, I and my colleagues would work all day struggling with the complexities of administering a program, trying to overcome the problems that face any government administrator. Then in the evening we'd go home, find time to watch a telecast or a television special. Perhaps there was an evening when there was a rebroadcast of the Presidential news conference or an excerpts telecast of a Presidential speech.

Watching this gave all of us a lift. It made us stand a little taller and get ready for the next day. He seemed to have had such a wonderful grasp of things to be such an incomparable leader. To deal with issues and problems in such a direct and precise manner.

At the same time overall was his youth coming through, his sense of humor, his sense of irony about life and about himself. You couldn't help but be moved by the total impression that the President made. To be moved and armed and strengthened for your own combat in this maze of government.

Layne, the leader sets the tone and the President sets the tone for his entire Administration, and it is this tone setting, it's not the details that's important. If President Kennedy had never proposed

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a law, if he had never proposed an administrative reform. If he had never proposed any improvement whatever in the operation of the Federal Government, he would still have had a tremendous contribution to make to the national government and the national life. His spirit and intelligence just radiated on all of us. His character and personality inspired us not only to work harder and get things done, but even more important to think about ends and to think about goals. To think about our job and our mission in relation to the goals of the nation and indeed the goals of all mankind. I'd put it another way—the President lifted the sights of all of us. He made all of us a little better than we actually were. We worked harder than we would have without his example. Even more important, we thought more experienced more of our lives and our work, a bit more sharply. We savored ideas more and I suspect we evaluated ourselves more critically. We were just plain better human beings—more aware, more alive, for having experienced the President, and I do believe that that was his supreme achievement.

BEATY: Well, Howard, do you recall any incidents when you received any kind of message, or bit of instruction, or any inquiry here in the Farmers Home Administration which you felt originated with the President even though maybe it wasn't the President himself on the telephone?

BERTSCH: We were never the recipients of any of those reported telephone calls from President Kennedy. I regret that we weren't. We might have been inspired to strive a little harder had we been. Most of our relationships came through channels. Secretary Freeman would identify for us the messages

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he got from the President and I think President Kennedy knew that his channels to the people of the Department of Agriculture were clear and uncluttered and he used them effectively. No, we wouldn't be able to identify specifics. But when the President sent a housing message to Congress or sent an agricultural message to Congress, they were so clearly drafted, so clearly enunciated that Farmers Home Administration, like every agency in the Department, was able to identify its role—its responsibilities in carrying out the purposes outlined in those messages. We knew always that he was a man of vitality, a man of great energy, a man of uncompromising principle over there. And we got this message, I believe, again I would use the term "by the tone that was set." It was a fascinating experience, those three years. It's an

experience in living, it's an experience in government. We are all proud to be in government, Layne. There have been times in my preceding 20 years in government where sometimes I had doubts as to whether this was a good calling, but John F. Kennedy made us all understand that participating in the government of 185,000,000 Americans was no small business. It was a business with great dignity, a business with great possibility, a business with great challenge. He never let us forget that the business of government is perhaps the most important business with which people are confronted these days.

BEATY: Howard, during President Kennedy's term there were, of course, a great many problems that came forward. There were national issues. There were problems in the field of foreign relations, the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Crisis. There were problems in labor and a great many others.

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Did you get the feeling that President Kennedy placed agricultural and rural domestic affairs of the United States up among the top layers of business, even though they didn't get the headlines as much as some of the more glamorous, more sensational, and more urgent time-wise problems? Would you like to evaluate that for a minute?

BERTSCH: Well, I think the Kennedy Administration had agriculture in its proper perspective. In the last decade or two, domestic issues in the United States have become relatively less important. They haven't become absolutely less important, of course, but these are the two decades in which we have taken an international leadership role. As our relationship to the whole world becomes so clear, then our own domestic affairs must be proportionately less preoccupying. If we don't handle our international problems aptly and confidently, then we won't have any domestic programs or policies. I think the fact that President Kennedy was willing and was instrumental in increasing the effectiveness of this organization by \$500,000,000 in two years, from \$300,000,000 to \$800,000,000, is the best concrete evidence that he was not ignoring the family farm, the low income farmer, and the small farm operator in America. He gave it nearly three times the emphasis his predecessor had.

BEATY: Could you see in this, Howard, a coordination of domestic agricultural things and in this include the whole picture, family farm economics, production, coordinating with all the rest of the spectrum of our national and international affairs, for instance? There was the matter of exports and imports, there was the matter of being able to feed ourselves in time of emergency, the matter of feeding other

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countries in need, the matter of, well, here at home we have the Civil Rights thing going on all the time which had some, I'm sure, relationship or bearing upon the administration of the

Farmers Home Administration, as well as other agencies of the Government. Would you like to comment on how the whole thing sort of fits into the overall picture?

BERTSCH: Well, my wisdom in that area is certainly not infallible. I do not claim expertise in that broad a spectrum. But there is no doubt that coordination of the federal establishment during the three Kennedy years reached almost the epitome of good government. This nation and the national government, the federal establishment, has become necessarily so influential, so tremendous in its force and impact on the lives not only of Americans but on the lives of practically all people. It has power that is so great that it can't be left uncontrolled and uncoordinated. Twenty years ago, thirty years ago, the federal establishment didn't have such power, didn't have such influence, didn't need such coordination. We could run a government without controls, without a sense of balance and proper perspective, in those years and do damage to no one.

But beginning with the 1960's, certainly, the federal establishment necessarily having the impact on the lives of the people that it has, then this brings a responsibility for reasonable leadership, effective coordination. We can't have chaos in an establishment as important to the life of the world as the federal government of the United States of America.

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BEATY: Howard, of course, you know that there are some people in this country who are critical of federal lending programs such as the Farmers Home Administration makes available. And sometimes these critics are quite vocal. Do you recall any time when such criticism reached President Kennedy and what his reaction to it might have been?

BERTSCH: I can't be specific about it, Layne, but I have every evidence or every reason to believe that on several occasions this criticism reached the President. And I think his response to it was almost precisely the same response he gave to other facets of his responsibility. I think he frequently said, "Let's get the facts." I don't think he prejudged this criticism. I don't think he turned it aside or brushed it off. I think he said "Give me a position paper on it." He went, as I indicated earlier, he sought out the best information that was available. He sought out the best judgments that were available. He used his Council of Economic Advisers. He used his Budget Bureau people. He asked for objective analysis of the criticism. Then he came to a decision which was always the right decision, I say because he had the right facts, at the right time, and the right place. None of the expansion which he authorized us to undertake, in fact, insisted upon us undertaking, was undertaken without thoughtfulness, without very deliberate analysis of the situation of the needs of the country. But once he set his course then there was no dilly dallying. Once he set his course, he expected action. This, I think, is the mark of a great administrator, and after all, the President of the United States must be our greatest administrator.

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BEATY: A great deal has been said by many people and certainly you have given eloquent testimony to this here today, Howard Bertsch, that President Kennedy was a sincere, warm individual with a keen, honest interest in people. Now, do you know of any instance where he had ever visited a family farm, or visited with, received in the White House or anywhere else a farm family or farmer—that is, a working average-type farmer. Now I know of one instance where the President appeared at one of the regional land and people conferences in Duluth, Minn., I believe. And I believe that the Farmers Home Administration was one of the agencies active in that conference. Do you have any recollections about that?

BERTSCH: Yes, he did come into Duluth. Unfortunately I wasn't representing our agency there, but we were represented. The impact of his meeting with that group of rural leaders, farm leaders who had a problem and who were trying to identify solutions to that problem. The impact he had on that meeting was incalculable. I suspect largely, as a result of the strength he gave it, the results of that meeting are still being felt, like ripples from dropping a stone in a pond.

BEATY: Could you elaborate on that?

BERTSCH: Many, many community groups, many, many community action agencies inspired by that meeting are proliferating, they're tackling specific projects in the Northern Great Lakes States. New subcommittees are still being formed on an action basis to deal with identified problems. Perhaps that was the most successful launching of a community action

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program this nation has ever seen. It's still early to evaluate the results, but literally hundreds and thousands of local people are grappling with their problems locally and resolving a great many of economic and social issues of which that section of our nation was faced.

BEATY: That meeting, I believe, was in September 1963?

BERTSCH: That's right. Here we are less than a year later and already finding the impact of it still on an expanding basis. I think that President Kennedy was not one to make a show of visiting homes of poor people, or inviting people to his home simply because they were poor. I don't think he ever let himself get in the position where he seemed to be taking advantage of the situation. I remember a former President of ours who used to get himself in pictures with Indian head dresses on. I can't imagine President Kennedy resorting to such publicity.

BEATY: He resisted gimmicks, I think especially those involving head gear. He didn't even like to wear a conventional type of hat, as I recall.

BERTSCH: I think he would have considered it a gimmick if he used a poor family, a low income family for publicity purposes. They weren't his normal associates and his life didn't permit that. And I don't think he would have tolerated anything abnormal in any of these respects. No, I don't recall him ever making a pilgrimage to a poor man's house, although maybe he did. If he did, he did it sincerely and the reason I didn't hear about it was because he didn't do it for publicity purposes.

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BEATY: Of course, during the campaign, I suppose, especially during some of the state primaries, he was out shaking hands with working people.

BERTSCH: Oh, indeed yes for that, particularly in West Virginia, Layne. This has been documented subsequently, and of course I wasn't here in the states during the campaign, but I have talked to many people who were and I read his speeches that he made out in West Virginia particularly in the campaign. I think this was in substantial measure an effort on his part to learn about this problem at firsthand, so he could better deal with it. This is not Farmers Home Administration activity but I do believe that the first act of his administration was to increase the direct food distribution of the Department of Agriculture in the Appalachian areas in West Virginia. This action couldn't have been taken so promptly, so immediately, if he hadn't come first-hand face-to-face with the problem during the campaign. I think this is probably always his purpose. It was to do whatever was necessary to learn, but to avoid, like the plague, any capitalization on the plight of other people.

BEATY: We've been visiting with Mr. Howard Bertsch, Administrator of the Farmers Home Administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, on July 9, 1964.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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