

Robert G. Lewis Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 06/08/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Robert G. Lewis
Interviewer: Larry J. Hackman
Date of Interview: June 8, 1967
Place of Interview: Washington D.C
Length: 30 pages

Biographical Note

Robert G. Lewis was the administrative assistant for Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin from 1957-1959, director of the national headquarters of Farmers for Kennedy-Johnson, and the Deputy Administrator of Commodity Operations in the Department of Agriculture. This interview focuses on the efforts to win farmers' support during the 1960 presidential campaign and legislation concerning agricultural issues during the Kennedy administration.

Access
Open

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed, March 3, 1972, copyright of the transcript has been retained by the donor. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any

concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Robert G. Lewis, recorded interview by Larry J. Hackman, June 8, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of Robert G. Lewis

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, Robert G. Lewis of Washington, D.C., do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted at Washington, D.C. on June 8, 1967 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interview is to be opened immediately to general research.
2. Researchers who have access to the transcript of the interview may listen to the tape; however, this is to be for background use only. Researchers may not cite, paraphrase or quote from the tape.
3. The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. Fifty years after the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.
4. Copies of the interview transcript may be provided upon request to any researcher.
5. Copies of the interview may, upon request, be deposited in other institutions.
6. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

*and to my heirs
for 50 years
thereafter RL*

Robert G. Lewis

Robert G. Lewis

Feb. 5, 1972

Date

James B. Rhoads

Archivist of the United States

March 3, 1972

Date

Robert G. Lewis– JFK #1

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Support for C. Estes Kefauver for the 1956 vice presidential nomination
2	Writing an article critical of John F. Kennedy's [JFK] position on agriculture
3	Farmers' Union opposition to JFK's speech at the 1956 JFK's relationship with John McCormack
4	Senator Proxmire's opinion of JFK
5	National Farmers' Union's support of Hubert Humphrey in 1960 primary
7	Function of the Democratic advisory council committee on agriculture
8	Farmers for Kennedy-Johnson
9	Being appointed co-director of the farm campaign
12	Farm conferences
13	Writing speeches for Democratic candidates
14	Being appointed Assistant Secretary in the commodity program
16	Emergency Feed Grains legislation
17	Agricultural legislation of 1961
19	Sympathy for the dairy program in the Department of Agriculture
20	Failure of agricultural legislation
23	The Kennedy administration's relations with dairy representatives
24	Attitude of the Farmers' Union towards JFK
25	Problems with the organization of the Department of Agriculture
26	Wheat referendum of 1963
28	Importance of the small farmers' votes
30	Importance of agricultural policy

Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT G. LEWIS

June 8, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Lewis, what involvement did you have in the career of John Kennedy up to the time when you left the National Farmers Union Newsletter and went to work for Senator [William W.] Proxmire?

LEWIS: Up until that time I had been active privately and informally in Democratic politics, both in Wisconsin and nationally. I had sympathized with Senator [C. Estes] Kefauver in the 1956 vice-presidential campaign, and I attended the Convention as a reporter for the National Farmers Union Newsletter and, of course, did a good deal of politicking on the side. Many of my friends were in the Wisconsin delegation and so forth. It was a Kefauver delegation. I applied whatever influence I had with delegates from the farm states where the Farmers Union was active on behalf of Senator Kefauver. We had not expected Senator Kennedy to become a candidate for vice president. That came very much as a surprise, I think, to almost everybody.

At that time, generally, the Farmers Union people, including myself, felt that Senator Kennedy was not sympathetic with the farm interest. He had voted generally more with the Farm Bureau than with the Farmers Union. He had not been inclined to support the Tennessee Valley Authority. He had made a speech in the House in which he took a very regional-interest point of view, opposing what he called the "subsidized competition" of the TVA area, as he called it, as I recall. And his general posture was considered regionally biased against the interests of the Midwest, the farmers, the public power interests, and so forth. So in the Convention I didn't really have any influence appreciably, but I did sympathize with my friends who were on the Wisconsin and Minnesota delegations who supported Senator Kefauver and were dismayed at Senator Kennedy's strong show and, of course, were delighted when Kefauver came through and won the nomination.

HACKMAN: Did you ever talk later with Senator Kennedy about his votes on these earlier issues? And why do you think he voted the way he

did? Was is strictly regional?

LEWIS: I never did discuss this with Senator Kennedy. I did talk, at one time, about 1960 with Arthur Schlesinger. I think maybe it was '58 or '59, in a Midwest Democratic conference in Detroit, if I remember right. I had known Schlesinger before, having served as [James G.] Jim Patton's alternate on the Americans For Democratic Action board of directors. I chided Schlesinger quite severely about supporting Kennedy, who didn't seem to me to be a liberal on the basis of economic issues. His position was that Kennedy intellectually was very liberal and very intelligent, but that he had betrayed a lack of information, a lack of sophistication, and a regional interest on those issues. But he didn't think that that should compromise his ultimate position. He felt that he would come out right on those issues from my standpoint. I also knew [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen, and Ted's brother, Doctor Phil [Philip C. Sorensen], I believe it was--well, I can't remember for sure the name of the brother that I knew.

HACKMAN: Was it the one that ran for . . .

LEWIS: No, it's not. It was an older brother who was a medical doctor. They were both here in Washington at the time.

And I did discuss this from time to time with Ted Sorensen, but I don't think he ever became really interested until the closing weeks of my editorship of the National Union Farmer and the National Farmers Union Newsletter. I wrote an article which was critical of Kennedy, and Ted Sorensen called me on that and asked me to meet with him and to talk it over. That was really the first time, I think, that anybody from the Kennedy entourage directly took note of the Farmers Union type of opposition which I represented.

HACKMAN: Do you remember some of the specifics that you discussed with Sorensen at that time?

LEWIS: Yes, I do. I finally saw Sorensen a week or so, or two or three, after the Newsletter item appeared, and I was on Proxmire's staff. And he put it on this basis, that now that I was working with a fellow senator, that we should have an understanding on it. And I explained at great length, at lunch down in the Senate cafeteria, for a period of two or three hours until the whole cafeteria was practically empty, the farmers' interest as viewed by the Farmers Union, and some of the objections that the Farmers Union had to the positions Kennedy had taken, a little of the background of the Farm Bureau-Farmers Union squabble, and the public power interest, and some of the other things. I believe that this was the first time that Ted Sorensen had ever heard discussed at length, and in any detail, the Food for Peace idea. It had never occurred to him that our agricultural productivity could be harnessed to the economic development cause. He was very interested in that and appeared to be very sympathetic to it. From that time forward Senator Kennedy did support the general idea, quite specifically by the time 1960 came along.

HACKMAN: How knowledgeable at that point was Sorensen in a general way on agricultural issues?

LEWIS: Well, I was a little surprised that he was relatively unsophisticated about it. His father had been a public power leader in Nebraska, and, incidentally, I believe my father had some contact with Sorensen's father in that connection. My father had been active in the rural electrification movement. And Nebraska is a very ardent public power state. But I am continually being surprised by the lack of understanding of the farm issue by many of the younger intellectuals. I'd say anybody two or three years older than me, and on down, haven't taken the farm interest very seriously and really don't know much about it. And Sorensen was no exception.

HACKMAN: Did you discuss with him, at that time, Kennedy's vote? I believe he made a speech just before that in '56 opposing the 90 percent parity?

LEWIS: Yes, I believe that speech was made to the American Farm Bureau Federation convention. That was one of the things that stuck in the Farmers Union craw, because he had espoused the Farm Bureau line, which was, we felt, even opposed to the pro-farmer interest in the Republican Party and reflected a kind of a John Birch influence, or inclination, ideologically. We felt that it was an extremely dogmatic ideological position that we couldn't abide in politicians, particularly Democratic politicians.

HACKMAN: Do you know who was influential in that period as far as advising Senator Kennedy on these subjects?

LEWIS: No, I really do not. I expect that it was. . . . It seemed to him and his staff, I suspect, to be the sophisticated, urban and urbane position to take on these backward hillbillies and grass roots people from the Midwest.

HACKMAN: It's been said by some people that possibly he followed Senator Clinton Anderson at that time, the former Secretary of Agriculture.

LEWIS: I certainly think that he would have been greatly influenced by Clint Anderson's position. Whether there was any actual collaboration, I don't know.

HACKMAN: You were talking about the conversation with Arthur Schlesinger. Did you have any other conversations with ADA people, as far as their attitude toward Kennedy?

LEWIS: Well, generally, I had for years been responsible for writing the ADA platform plank on agriculture, and we would debate it all night and finally get the plank the way the Farmers Union wanted it, and then it would be approved without a murmur of controversy on the floor.

I talked to Gardner Jackson, for example, who was an early admirer of the Kennedys, and at one time sponsored him a little bit socially in Washington, and thought that he had great promise. And Jackson was just simply unclear about what accounted for Kennedy's position. He knew the farm issue quite well, had worked at one time for the Farmers Union, and was sympathetic with their point of view. But he just chalked it up to inexperience and unfamiliarity. Other than that, I don't think there were many people in the ADA that really took agriculture really seriously. It was more a problem with the rural electric people, the public power interests, and the strictly farm interests.

HACKMAN: What changes did you observe in Senator Kennedy's position on agriculture and farm problems in the period, let's say, '56 to '59?

LEWIS: Well, I think in that period Kennedy discovered middle America, in a way, and became more, better informed about what the issues were, the economic issues that agitated people out there. And I think they did a pretty respectable job of developing a more viable political position for a national Democratic candidate to have. They did, I think, shift closer to the Farmers Union position on things, and the REA [Rural Electrification Administration] cooperatives, and the dairy interests and so forth. Generally, it was a matter of discovery of what these interests were and what they wanted, and learning to say the right things, that is, right from the political standpoint. I think there was a process of genuine education involved also in that the position actually did mature and develop, aside, that is, above and beyond the propaganda position.

HACKMAN: After you became Senator Proxmire's administrative assistant, did you have frequent contacts with Kennedy or his staff?

LEWIS: Yes, quite a bit in the course of Senate business. Proxmire and Kennedy would cosponsor legislation from time to time, and we had other questions that we were in touch with each other. Shortly before leaving Proxmire's staff to go to work for Governor [Gaylord A.] Nelson, I had lunch with [Myer] Mike Feldman and others of Kennedy's staff just to explore the general farm issue and the Wisconsin problem, and so forth. At that time, I was already quite alert to the possibility that Kennedy and [Hubert H.] Humphrey might be involved in a primary out there in Wisconsin, and I was sympathetic to Humphrey. And so I appreciated the goodwill, the gesture, that was implicit in Mike's inviting me to lunch, but I didn't sign up.

HACKMAN: What was Senator Proxmire's opinion of Senator Kennedy in general at that point?

LEWIS: I think Proxmire's opinion was high. I felt, personally, that Proxmire had somewhat let down Senator Humphrey in not supporting him staunchly and early and clearly, and that his unwillingness to commit himself publicly to Humphrey was a serious handicap for Humphrey,

that it did hurt him. I felt, actually, that some of the things in Proxmire's consideration was Proxmire's problem politically in that he was divorced, and that he felt the association with Kennedy would be helpful to him in the Catholic areas of the state. I think that that was sound political judgment, but nevertheless, I was disappointed because I felt that Proxmire, and other Wisconsin Democrats, ought to support Humphrey, who had been very helpful to the Wisconsin Democratic Party and candidates in their days in the wilderness.

HACKMAN: What role did you take specifically in that primary in Wisconsin?

LEWIS: Governor Nelson was neutral, and his staff were asked to be neutral. I took no official role, or public role, at all in the campaign. I did talk with the Humphrey campaign managers from time to time. I did write speeches occasionally for Senator Humphrey. My wife was an officer of the Humphrey for President Club during the primary. I toured with the Senator a little bit--Senator Humphrey. So there was really no secret among anybody as to where the Lewis family stood. But because of Governor Nelson's attempts to avoid lasting hard feeling in the party, we all, all of the Humphrey people at least on the staff, did maintain a position of overt neutrality. We took no public position. We did not get on committees and so forth. I don't think it really was a very effectively demonstrated neutrality, actually, because, as I say, my wife and Edwin R. Ed Bayley's wife both were out campaigning with Humphrey when he came to Dane County and so forth.

HACKMAN: What role did the National Farmers Union organization in Wisconsin play in that primary?

LEWIS: The Wisconsin Farmers Union was very active in its support of Senator Humphrey. The area where their principal membership was concentrated was in the ninth and third districts. Those were the old districts represented by Alvin O'Konski in the north and Lester Johnson on the west. Then the second district, which included Dane County, the Farmers Union had considerable membership there. Those were the three that Humphrey carried. And I think the Farmers Union was. . . . In many of those rural areas the Farmers Union leadership put on a different hat in the election campaign, and constitute the Democratic Party leadership, where the urban people are generally Republican, and the principal voting strength of the Democrats is among the farmers.

HACKMAN: After Senator Humphrey was defeated in Wisconsin, well, let's say after Wisconsin and then West Virginia, did you at that point move to another candidate as a favorite candidate?

LEWIS: No, I did not. I really was in no position to do anything publicly, anyway. I was not a delegate. The question never arose. I wasn't invited in by the Kennedy faction, at that stage. Humphrey had no cues to offer to his followers, so we just kind of waited to see what would happen.

HACKMAN: Were you in close enough contact with Mr. Patton at that time to comment on what his position was after Humphrey was defeated in the primaries by Senator Kennedy?

LEWIS: I really wasn't very close to Jim Patton at that time. He is a very close and dear friend of mine, and it was not a problem of sharing his confidences, but just the physical separation; the occasion didn't present itself. So I couldn't really speak with any authority on what his maneuvers were at that time. He had been a friend of Senator [Robert S.] Kerr and had given considerable encouragement to Kerr from time to time in his unsuccessful gestures for the presidency. He was also, I believe, at that time, fairly close to President [Harry S.] Truman's position. Now, where he came down in the Convention on it, I really don't know.

HACKMAN: Skipping ahead a little bit, since we're talking about Wisconsin, what do you think were the main causes for Kennedy's losing in Wisconsin in the general election?

LEWIS: Well, I think that in the primary Humphrey carried the Democratic vote, and Kennedy won with Republicans or independents who went into the Democratic primary. And the candidate who had major support in the party having been defeated, I think that the party effort was weakened. But it's interesting that the districts which Kennedy carried in the general election were the ones which Humphrey had carried in the primary. Now I don't remember precisely just what the breakdown was, and I think Kennedy did better in the general than the three districts. But he did carry those districts more strongly than the ones that he had himself won in the primary. As I recall, it was fairly close. It was a terribly close election nationally, as you know. And I think that that marginal difference--the fact that the Democratic candidate was not the general election candidate--that accounted for the failure of the ticket to come through.

HACKMAN: Did you serve at all in '59 and '60 as a personal advisor on agricultural matters to Senator Kennedy? I had read at least in one place that that was so, and . . .

LEWIS: '59 and '60? No. Except during the campaign.

HACKMAN: That's curious because somebody has made a mistake. Do you know this book by this fellow [Don F.] Hadwiger, from Iowa State, that came out? I believe he has in there specifically that in 1959 you were hired by Senator Kennedy as an agriculture advisor.

LEWIS: No, there was a young man in Wisconsin named Robert Moses, who had been the radio broadcaster for the Wisconsin Farmers Union, who quit the Farmers Union and went to work for Kennedy. Because Bob Lewis and Bob Moses sound somewhat the same and because at various times we had both been publicists for the Farmers Union, we sometimes get mixed up. But that, I think, is where the error came in.

No, I was the secretary of the Democratic advisory council committee

on agriculture in 19--I think it started in '59 and '60. And we drafted the farm plank substantially as it was approved by the Convention. It was from that connection that I was active in the national farm policy.

HACKMAN: Could you talk a little about how that council functioned?

LEWIS: Yes. You know, of course, who the members were. The house-keeping was done by the National Committee. Charles Tyroler was sort of the major domo, and he took care of getting the paper work done. It was called to a meeting in Washington--the time is kind of fuzzy now--to talk about getting up a booklet, or a pamphlet, on agriculture. The National Committee had published something which everybody felt was quite inadequate. So our mission was to try to put together a statement, and I produced two drafts of the statement. I still have a copy or two in my files. But by the time, several meetings later, we had a statement pretty much agreed to, it was too late in the game, into 1960, to be published to any advantage. So we then switched to drafting the platform plank.

I think that the advisory committee did help to give coherence to the Democratic Party's farm interests. Claude Wickard and [Charles F.] Charlie Brannan were members. I don't remember whether Clint Anderson was invited to be, or whether he was or not. I think he may have been invited, but had declined. I believe Steve Pace was on the committee--I think not; I think he was later on the Kennedy campaign committee. But anyway, this did provide a respectable means for the farm interest to get together and to develop a consistent position which it could then present to the national party.

HACKMAN: How much of a substantive interest did Governor [Herschel C.] Loveless of Iowa take in this thing?

LEWIS: He was a quite active chairman. He followed it quite closely, and I was on the phone and had conversations with him a number of times. He represents a very agricultural state, and, of course, Iowa and agriculture are almost synonymous. And it was close to both his personal and political interests.

HACKMAN: Was there a great deal of disagreement among the various members of this group, particularly the farm organizations involved? I know somebody from the American Farm Bureau was involved in this thing.

LEWIS: I don't remember whether there were any bona fide Farm Bureau representatives on the committee. I'm quite sure that there weren't any bona fides; I don't even know that there were any nominal Farm Bureau members. At least their point of view was not seriously pushed, I think. It was a pretty pragmatic, anti-[Ezra T.] Benson, anti-Republican farm program, traditional Democratic position, with which, by that time, the Farmers Union had become very actively identified.

HACKMAN: If any one specific area, what were you particularly concerned

in accomplishing in getting in the plank? For instance, in the dairy area, as a representative of Wisconsin?

LEWIS: Well, I was interested in the dairy side of it, but actually my interest was more general and broader. I wanted the party to take a strong position in favor of a good strong farm program that would support higher, rather than lower, farm prices, and strong farm income. We developed the parity of income position in that committee, which was subsequently approved by the Convention. That was really a very dramatic new departure in farm policy. It has not had impressive support subsequently, but it. . . .

HACKMAN: How were the general recommendations of the council finally boiled down into what became the agricultural plank of the platform?

LEWIS: At our latest meeting, after having had a hearing in Chicago for a couple of days and hearing from everybody, Governor Loveless appointed me to work with Willard W. Will Cochrane from the University of Minnesota and Art Thompson from his staff to put together a draft which then could be submitted to the various members--that is, a draft proposal for the farm plank--which we did on the basis of the agreements and discussions we'd had in the committee.

HACKMAN: Was there a pretty general acceptance of this draft by the committee members?

LEWIS: Yes.

HACKMAN: Was it necessary to condense this further?

LEWIS: Yes. We had a number of boiling-down sessions, and then I think the platform committee boiled it down some more when they got it. What finally came out was in substance what we had said; it endorsed the parity of income position, which was the principal thing.

HACKMAN: Was Governor Loveless active in the writing of this at all? Or was the actual drafting mostly done

LEWIS: The drafting was done by Art Thompson and Will Cochrane and me. We handled the words.

HACKMAN: Did you attend the '60 Convention?

LEWIS: I did not attend the Convention.

HACKMAN: How did you become involved in the Farmers for Kennedy-Johnson group then?

LEWIS: Shortly after the Convention was over, the National Committee called, I believe, the advisory committee on agriculture back

to Washington, or at least the important segments of it. And I was invited to go, and I did. I went. And I met there Sargent Shriver, who had campaigned in Wisconsin. I had not met him there, but my wife met him at a party in Dane County and got into an argument with him about Kennedy's farm policy, which he remembered. He opened our little meeting with some jocular reminiscences about how Bob Lewis' wife had taught him that he was not a farmer. And then we offered some advice to Shriver and the National Committee people about how to conduct a farm campaign. We did a lot of talking, and I can't even really remember very clearly what specific advice we contributed, maybe some names and so forth.

HACKMAN: When you say "we," particularly who do you mean?

LEWIS: Well, it was a group of people who had been called in from around the country, Democratic farm experts and farm leaders. Just who all they were, I don't know, but I think pretty much the same people as had been on the advisory committee.

Well, then I went back home. Governor Nelson had a big campaign coming up, and he had, with my staff help, developed a very lively farm issue, and we expected to really work hard on the farm issue during his campaign. A few days later I got a telephone call from Sarge Shriver, which, without exaggeration, lasted a half an hour to forty-five minutes, in which he told me that I was the hottest thing in agriculture that had come down the pike for a long time, and that the President just absolutely had to have me, or the Senator, rather. And I was not really eager to go off to Washington because my family were in Wisconsin and I had just barely gotten them settled there the summer before. But with that kind of urging, I talked to the Governor, and he said there was no choice but to go. So I went.

Well, I had understood that I was being invited in to be the director of the farm campaign. So after having resigned my position in Wisconsin, I got out to Washington, and Sarge Shriver informed me that there were four directors. I was a co-director. There was going to be one in the West Coast, and another one in the Midwest, and another one in the South. Well, that kind of took me aback. I clearly believe that Sarge Shriver is not the most dependable character in the world when he is trying to sell somebody on working for him. And I sure got took in, I believe. He had already hired some of my staff for me also, which I didn't particularly appreciate, and we had some problems as a result.

But that's how I got involved in the campaign. I did my damndest; I worked very hard and long. And we did not carry very many of the farm states, but without Missouri and Minnesota, which are farm states and which we couldn't have carried without strong support from the farmers, Kennedy would never have been President. So we, as do many other marginal workers in the vineyard, we claim that we, too, made the difference.

HACKMAN: Could you go in more detail about exactly how this was organized from your Washington office, this whole effort?

LEWIS: Well, we set up a national committee of which Claude Wickard was chairman. And we tried to get representative farm leaders,

people who carried weight with the farming community throughout the country. Many of these people I recruited myself, having by this time known the whole country fairly well as far as agriculture is concerned. We even got some Farm Bureau members to serve on the committee. And we had a meeting out in Indiana, I believe it was.

As most of these campaign committees go, the committee doesn't actually initiate very much, but they kind of react to what the directors, the managers, have thought up to do. That's about how this one worked. We did urge, with some success, the members of our committee to use material we had sent them for press releases and speeches and so forth. Our aim was to generate as much positive publicity as we could to identify policy ideas and commitments of the candidate with supporters who would be recognized as bona fide farmers and leaders like Secretary Wickard and Charlie Brannan. Steve Pace was a member of that committee, a former chairman of the House agriculture committee. That was the general procedure.

HACKMAN: What about these other three people that were the co-chairmen? Were they involved in this at all?

LEWIS: They did meet with us, yes. One of them was James Ralph, who at that time was Commissioner of Agriculture in California and who subsequently became Assistant Secretary and came a cropper in the Billie Sol Estes case. Another one was Ralph Bradley, who subsequently became Commissioner of Agriculture in Illinois. He worked out of his office in the Midwest. Another was Alex Nunn on the editorial staff of the Progressive Farmer in Birmingham, a very distinguished and capable gentleman who came into Washington and worked in Washington very closely with me and contributed greatly to our work, very importantly. I think he did a good deal to help hold the votes in the South which we did hold.

HACKMAN: How active was Governor Loveless in this?

LEWIS: Well, the Governor was busy with his own campaign, but we communicated by telephone from time to time, and Governor Loveless would issue statements at our prompting from time to time--that is, we would discuss with him what he might say about the farm question that might be helpful, and if he agreed with it, why, he'd say it, or he'd say something that he'd thought of himself that seemed to fit the bill. He was sincerely and actively interested in the agricultural issue nationally.

HACKMAN: When you supplied these people in the field with materials, was there a great deal of differentiation made as far as area and commodity in the type of information you gave out?

LEWIS: Well, we would answer specific inquiries and interests from time to time. Most of our material we sent out quite uniformly to our committee members and others that we got on the mailing lists around the country, partly because we didn't have the staff capability to do a fine job of differentiation, but also because the big issue was, are you for higher farm prices or not. And if you're for higher farm prices,

how do you intend to do it? So that pretty much cut across the board in agriculture. We did have a special wheat advisory committee, and a cotton, I believe, and on Food for Peace, and I think two or three other things-- soil conservation, and so forth, cooperatives--through which we developed specific program ideas, which then were aimed at the people who'd be primarily interested in those things.

HACKMAN: In wording these specific programs, were you in contact with the national Kennedy headquarters, or was this basically done independently by the office you were operating?

LEWIS: Well, we were in touch with the rest of the campaign, and nothing that was. . . . It was my responsibility to insure that anything that was said would be authentic; it would represent Kennedy. And Will Cochrane was Kennedy's personal advisor on agricultural economics issues. He ran interference for us with the campaign leadership to a considerable extent. I did talk some with Mike Feldman and other Kennedy campaign people, too. I talked money problems with [Stephen E.] Steve Smith and a number of things with [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy.

HACKMAN: I was going to ask as far as you were saying money problems, how was this whole business financed?

LEWIS: It was financed, for the most part, by the National Committee. We tried to organize local and state committees and urge them to raise money to buy advertising. We furnished copy for ads, and so forth. But the Washington and field operations were financed by the National Committee.

HACKMAN: Was there any set policy on whether these farmers groups would work with other Kennedy volunteer organizations on the local level, or were the two kept separately, or do you remember was there any policy or not?

LEWIS: I don't remember that that was a problem at all. Now in the rural areas, you're not likely to get more than one organization going, and there was, I'm sure, no problem that I was aware of about conflict. We supplied information to other candidates all over the country, and other party organizations, anybody that asked for it. The various cooperative and farm organization groups would write in to us, or telephone, for information, and we just served anybody that wanted to turn to and give some help. I don't think that the volunteers, the citizens versus the party organization, was a problem for us.

HACKMAN: The religious issue supposedly played such a key role in some of these rural areas. Was there ever any policy developed on how you would handle this, or how these people in the field should handle this when it came up?

LEWIS: We insured, to the best we could, that the general campaign

material on this question got distributed to the rural people as well as others. We were quite sensitive to it at all times. We would channel requests for service on that issue that came to us to the proper place to make sure that they were taken care of. But specifically we didn't. . . . I remember one time Sarge Shriver came in with a clipping from one of the religious magazines of a statement by a Lutheran pastor in Illinois, which he wanted to get out to every rural boxholder in Illinois, to that Missouri Synod of Lutherans. Well, it was far beyond our total budget to do it, so we just couldn't do it. But I don't remember any great deal of specific activity that we had on this.

HACKMAN: What parts of the country was it most difficult to get this farmer-type support going in? And what was the best, the easiest?

LEWIS: The most difficult is always New England, the Northeast, because the farmers up there are so accustomed to being a forgotten, by-passed minority, and they're so predominantly Republican, anyway, that it's terribly hard to find Democrats among them to put on a letterhead. But throughout the farm states there was no serious problem of finding people who were willing to serve on committees and have their names listed publicly, and doing, with some effectiveness, some work.

HACKMAN: How were these farm conferences that were held in various places organized? Was this done from your office? The one in Des Moines, for instance, and then I believe there was at least one planned in Oklahoma City, and maybe one in California.

LEWIS: I wasn't involved in planning the Des Moines conference. I came on board, or I had agreed to come on board, just before that conference was held. And I was very pleased when Senator Kennedy arrived for his speech. I was seated at the head table, and as he walked down the line, he recognized me and shook my hand and said that he was glad to have me aboard. That was done, I think, pretty much by the National Committee, and I believe Charles Tyroler had a hand in it.

HACKMAN: How successful did you think it was? Do you have any. . . .

LEWIS: Well, I think that the main importance of something like that is, in the first place, what kind of publicity does it generate, and in the second place is, what does it do to motivate the people who are there. I think it was pretty successful.

HACKMAN: By this time did you feel that Kennedy was more confident when he talked about agricultural issues, and more effective?

LEWIS: Well, I felt that Senator Kennedy had received some able tutoring from Hubert Humphrey in campaigning Wisconsin and was becoming alert to the farm issue. I was by this time pretty ardently pro-Kennedy, as opposed to Mr. [Richard M.] Nixon. I felt that he did

respond quite, quite well, quite satisfactorily, to the farm issue as we developed it and presented it.

HACKMAN: Did you or your Washington office do any speech writing for Senator Kennedy, or for other candidates at that time?

LEWIS: Yes. I can't remember all the speeches I wrote for Proxmire, and Nelson, and people that I had worked with before, and others around the country. I did write some speeches for Kennedy, also, and had a hand in his plowing match speech and in the paper that Will Cochrane did, a little letter-sized booklet on agriculture in the 1960's, or whatever it was. I wrote, particularly, a speech which Kennedy used in his swing through Wisconsin on the milk surpluses, and so forth. I did get in on the speech writing, although my function was not supposed to be speech writing, and I did get called on to get together material to refute Nixon's attack on the food price increase and a number of other things.

HACKMAN: What about speeches for then Senator [Lyndon B.] Johnson?

LEWIS: My roommate at that time was Ralph Huitt. We were both batching in Washington with our wives and children back in Madison, Wisconsin. Ralph is now an Assistant Secretary of HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] and was working in the Johnson campaign. Johnson had one of the best farm speech writers in the business, [Charles S.] Charlie Murphy, and Charlie didn't really need much help. He would stop in once in awhile, and we'd exchange information and so forth, but there was no need for staff assistance to be given to the Johnson campaign.

HACKMAN: There was a group at that time headed by Frank Smith, I believe, from Mississippi, who was releasing some press releases on agriculture. Was that group in any contact with your office?

LEWIS: I just don't remember what. . . . I vaguely remember that Frank Smith was doing something in that time, but I can't recall just what it was, or what its significance was.

HACKMAN: Well, you talked a little bit previously about the effect of this whole movement in Missouri and Minnesota, I believe. What general comments do you have on the effectiveness of the whole movement and, also, reasons as to Kennedy's failure to do better in some rural areas, particularly in the Midwest?

LEWIS: Well, I think that it should be remembered, of course, that after four years of Benson, who was very unpopular, [Dwight D.] Eisenhower nevertheless won again in '56. Farmers, I think, perhaps more than most other people, will vote for interests that they consider superior to their own economic interests. The farmers, I think, voted for Eisenhower because they felt that they were Americans first and farmers second. Whether

they were mistaken, as I think they were, or not, that's, I think, the way it really looked to them.

The Suez crisis had just broken out at that time. I was traveling with Senator Kefauver during that period, and I can remember the very noticeable change in the crowds that took place as the Suez crisis broke out. A coldness, aloofness, lack of enthusiasm for Kefauver and for the ticket which was palpable. So I think that for the younger people the religious issue was not very serious. I suspect that it came close to being a draw. The Protestants in the Protestant areas, the more conservative people who might have voted Democratic instead of Republican, but who were basically inclined to vote Republican anyway, probably voted for Nixon, whereas they might have voted for a Protestant Democrat because they didn't like Benson. But that may have been overbalanced by Catholic farmers who were conservative, who would otherwise have voted for a Republican.

HACKMAN: Skipping to something else, in that special session of Congress in August, Senator Kennedy cosponsored a bill with Senator Proxmire on dairy supports, I believe. Did you play any role in getting these two people together?

LEWIS: No, I didn't. I was back in Wisconsin when that was initiated. That was pretty much, I think, written by the National Milk Producers Federation. It was pretty much their work. And I think perhaps Senator Proxmire took the initiative on calling that to the Kennedy office attention. It was a natural.

HACKMAN: I know it. I think, as it turned out, Senator Kennedy probably got a lot more publicity out of it when Eisenhower signed it than Senator Proxmire did, even though he was the original sponsor.

After the election, in the period between the election and before you came to work for the Department of Agriculture, what were you involved in particularly?

LEWIS: Well, I went back to Madison. I had worked very hard during the campaign, and I had a little infection which I hadn't been able to take care of, so I went under a doctor's care. It was just a kind of a sticking little problem, but I was kind of bushed and sick. And so I kind of licked my wounds for a month or so, and then I went back on the Governor's payroll until I came to Washington.

HACKMAN: When did you first find out about your appointment over here? How did this develop? Could you go into that?

LEWIS: Well, I, of course, expected that I should be a part of the administration, and I wanted to be. I've given my life to farm policy, and the farmers were kind of being shot out from under me as time goes on. I had talked to [Thomas R.] Tom Hughes a number of times by phone, inquiring when I might get in to have an interview with the Secretary-designate. Governor Nelson had written to him, and so forth.

Then I had to wait until I got myself patched up and physically was able. I came in about a week or so before the Inauguration, about ten days before, and I talked to Secretary [Orville L.] Freeman, who, I felt, didn't give me the recognition that I should have had, but that was. . . . As he explained it, I had the misfortune of being from Wisconsin in an administration where the Secretary of Agriculture was from Minnesota.

HACKMAN: Was there ever any consideration of any appointment other than the one you eventually wound up with?

LEWIS: Well, he offered me the presidential appointment as administrator of REA. And I had had considerable experience with REA before that. So I had a great deal of affection for the program. My father had worked in it for twenty-one years before he died. But I felt that I pretty much knew that aspect of public policy, and I wanted to concentrate on commodities. And the position I asked for is the one that Jim Ralph got, the Assistant Secretary in charge of the commodity program. Of course, the administration is interested in balancing its appointments geographically, and so forth. Now during that period, I was told by [Patrick J.] Pat Lucey, who was at that time the national committeeman from Wisconsin and had been the Kennedy wheelhorse in Wisconsin, that the Kennedy people had told him that Freeman was not supposed to give me an appointment at all because I had worked for Humphrey. And he advised me not to contest it, or I'd wind up without anything to do. And other friends of mine also advised me to go ahead and get into the administration and be glad, which I did.

HACKMAN: Did you ever find out later if. . . . Did you ever get any confirmation of this?

LEWIS: Well, I'm sure that Pat, although we have been on the opposite side of the fence in Wisconsin, we've also been very good friends for a long time, and I'm sure that he did not deceive me. I think he was told that by a young man--Ralph Dungan, now the ambassador to Chile. And I don't think Ralph spoke with any real authority. If I had been wiser, I think I would have run it down and nailed it at the time. Now this is something which people, I guess, learn as they live--this whole business of how to get along in politics. It's not a very satisfying kind of career, in many ways, on the appointive side. I'm somewhat disaffected by it.

HACKMAN: Let's talk then about when you first came over to USDA. What were you involved in in the very early days?

LEWIS: Well, I was the Deputy Administrator in charge of the commodity programs--that is, the price support, production policies, and so forth. It was a very key position in developing new farm programs. Then I rather centered on the dairy policy for the Department. I had a good deal to learn, and I greatly welcomed the opportunity. I had

to learn about government operations and so forth.

HACKMAN: What type problems came up in the transition from the old administration to the new, as far as you were particularly concerned? What shape was the program in as far as administration?

LEWIS: Well, I think that the strictly administrative side of it was really in pretty good shape. I think that some of the serious problems that did turn up reflected problems that had their roots back in earlier Democratic administrations, but had not been kept up with during the eight years of the Republican administration. I'm thinking particularly of the, well, the Billie Sol Estes problem in relation to cotton allotments. And I don't think the fault is really so much with the administration as with the legislation and the legislative influence. There had not been a clear rationalization of how these scarcity devices should be administered and handled in a way that would make economic sense, and particularly in a way that would not be too arbitrary and too dependent upon arbitrary administrative decisions, rather than the more or less normal market influences.

HACKMAN: When you first came here, did you try to go about impressing people with this, Secretary Freeman or the administration?

LEWIS: Well, actually, this was not in my direct field of responsibility. I was in charge of the numbers, the price to set on cotton, not on the acreage allotments. A different Deputy Administrator, Emery Jacobs, was in charge of that. What I'm saying reflects the judgment after the fact very much. Then later I did become more familiar with the whole gamut of operations, and I did develop some proposals for modernizing, streamlining, and making more efficient, I felt, the management of inventories and sales operations and the storage programs, and so forth.

HACKMAN: Was this during the Kennedy period, or would that have been after Johnson . . .

LEWIS: That was pretty much after the Kennedy period.

HACKMAN: Why don't we cut this off and let me switch this tape over.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

HACKMAN: Were you involved in the formulation of this Emergency Feed Grains legislation at all that was put through pretty soon after the administration came in?

LEWIS: Yes. The decision to proceed with that had actually been made before the Inauguration and before I got to Washington. I think Secretary Freeman was impressed with the prospect, if

something were not done to reduce production, of having substantial quantities of grain dumped on the ground at harvest time with no place to store it. He felt that that would be politically disastrous, or very serious, as well, I think, as feeling that it was bad for the country.

Well, I, from the very beginning, had not been terribly sympathetic with this scarcity approach, and I had written a series of articles in 1959 in the Progressive which had emphasized that supply management could be used to reduce the supply, to raise prices as far as the country would stand, would tolerate, but that that would involve enormous waste of resources, idling, plowing under potential food production, which I didn't think was really acceptable for anything more than a short run. And I certainly hoped that the Emergency Feed Grains program would represent buying a little time to develop programs and ways and means for expanding consumption and supported it on that basis.

As the details of the programs were being developed, I was in charge of developing program regulations, and so forth. One particular problem that I objected to was this question of selling stocks back into the market. I always felt that the emphasis in the publicity should have been placed on the payment-in-kind aspect, that we are taking out of the market potential production of, say, a hundred units and putting back only forty-five or fifty units. I felt that we could have, by more effective presentation of what we were doing, made it clear that we were actually reducing the supply put on the market rather than "dumping" Commodity Credit Corporation stocks. That point may seem like a fine point, or a fine debating point, but some time during the first year the objection was raised, with quite considerable success--and it's still going on--that the government has been dumping stocks to break prices. Well, I think, in view of what the factual situation is, that the fact that stocks put back in the market were restricted to not more than 50 percent of the potential supply taken off by idling the land was overlooked.

HACKMAN: Well, then, during the formulation of the more general, more comprehensive agricultural legislation in '61, what role did you play, and what were your opinions as this developed?

LEWIS: I concentrated on the dairy program. We developed a supply management program, and it did not get support from the dairy farmers' organizations. Looking back on how we did it, I think there were two principal reasons that it did not. I think the most important was that instead of seeing what the government's obligation was now, let's say six hundred million dollars a year to buy surplus dairy products, and seeing what we could do, spending that much money, to get better results, the Department of Agriculture allowed itself to get into a position of trying to save money for the government to reduce the budget.

Well, here you had an interest group that had been shortchanged on income, prices. One of the major factors in building Democratic strength in many states had been the farm revolt. At that point to seek to use supply management to save pressure on the budget instead of on behalf of farm income, I felt, was a bad choice, both in equity and in politics. Will Cochrane came back from the Budget Bureau and the Council of Economic

Advisors with a commitment to reduce dairy program costs to two hundred million dollars. Well, they were running then at about six hundred million. And I objected and got it up to three hundred million. But even so, the dairy leaders looked at it, and they could clearly see that there was nothing in this program that was going to improve their income. They would have to produce a little less, and get a slightly higher price. It's true that it would prevent things from getting much worse if the programs collapsed, but this did not motivate the farmers to support what we were trying to do. They just dug in their heels and said, "We aren't going to budge," particularly when we also asked for authority to reduce the floor under prices in the event that the farmers did not vote for the controls. Well, this was offering a program that, I think by general consent, the farmers would say is not a better program. They had a chance to vote for controls and a moderately improved price or if they turned down controls, then they would be worse off than they ever had been under the Republicans.

Then, I think, also, we made a mistake in not consulting the formal dairy organizations more directly and specifically. We set up an advisory committee, which included mostly their members, members of their boards. But I do feel that we'd have gotten better results if we had gone directly to the formal organizations and dealt with them rather than setting up our own committees, even though they included their people. I think that I now can perceive how an institution has a life and a mind of its own which is quite different from the sum of all of its electorate. And to make up our own representative group from the National Milk Producers Federation, for example, to make up their own executive committee, let's say, isn't the same thing as dealing with their general manager who represents their own organic structure.

HACKMAN: Did you express that opinion at the time, or is this more in retrospect?

LEWIS: I did express my feelings about the spending level, not as forcefully as I would do it by retrospect. But the other question-- I was as much mistaken as anybody.

HACKMAN: What was your opinion as far as the general approach, rather than commodity-by-commodity approach, this shift to where the Secretary of Agriculture, in conjunction with these farmer committees, would write up the commodity programs, and then it would be submitted to Congress, and they would have sixty days to veto?

LEWIS: Well, I felt that the commodity-by-commodity approach was the sound way to do it. The trend in agriculture is toward increasing specialization. The old diversified farm no longer makes sense for most situations. The farmer thinks of himself as selling milk, or beef, or hogs. He may raise corn and sell it in the form of hogs, a corn hog farmer, or a wheat farmer, or so forth. I felt that the program, in order to be successful, would have to have the specific homemade feeling about it. I still think so.

I also did advocate quite energetically in the Department, and was defeated

on it, that the whole Department organization structure should be reoriented to a commodity-by-commodity basis. We have in the Department here a dozen or more separate agencies that have got the word "dairy" or "milk" in their names, or in their responsibility. Price supports on butter and cheese and milk powder are in one agency; a different agency completely and a different administrator, are in charge of the fluid milk program, and the milk consumption program, and still another, the dairy plant inspection, and so on. So the result is that the dairy farmers don't know who their man is in the Department of Agriculture. You know, they're kind of at sea; they're lost, and they don't identify with the Department. Nor do the bureaucrats identify with the commodity. Every man perceives only what he has in his own hand, that part of the elephant that he's got his hands on. Then his policy is related only to what he is directly responsible for. He may not know what the blind man next to him--what part of the elephant he's got.

HACKMAN: Did you find any support for this idea in the Department at that time?

LEWIS: Well, there was some sympathy for it, particularly among some of the older hands. But I think that this whole question of re-organization became a struggle for power between two ends of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service; the farmer committee end, that is, the field operations, versus the commodity division's end. And my point of view was an extension of the commodity division's interest, which would go back more to what the old Production and Marketing Administration had been like in the forties, before the Republicans re-organized it. And the administrator was a former state director, and he carried the day with the Secretary.

HACKMAN: As far as the '61 legislation and your belief that the commodity-by-commodity approach should be used, how was the Department divided on this issue, and who was particularly for using this new approach?

LEWIS: Well, I don't think there was any really serious division in the Department. It was a matter of everybody working together quite energetically and enthusiastically, and there weren't hard battle lines drawn at that stage. It seemed to be--I think a lot of people felt that the Secretary's hopes for getting as broad authority as he was asking were quite ambitious, but they were certainly willing to back him, and hoped that he could make it. But he didn't.

HACKMAN: Did you become involved in the congressional effort that year, as far as any contacts with people on the Hill, in the effort to get this legislation passed?

LEWIS: Not full time. I did have many friends on the Hill, who I had volunteered to talk to, and who called on me some and so forth.

HACKMAN: Would this involve mostly people from Wisconsin, or. . . .

LEWIS: Yes, primarily Wisconsin, but some others throughout the Farmers Union area, the Dakotas, and Montana, Minnesota.

HACKMAN: Could you describe how the Department went about formulating its legislative proposals, as far as the process goes, and to what extent you were usually involved, let's say, each year, as they formulated their proposals?

LEWIS: Well, generally various individuals were bird-dogged for a specific commodity program. I had the lead on dairy, John Schnittker and [Edwin A.] Ed Jaenke on wheat, and Jaenke and Will Cochrane on feed grain, and so on. And we would work with the General Counsel's office and the various policy people and program people who were relevant to the problem, with the advisory committees, and try to put together a proposition, which we would work over with our advisory committees and try to see how far we could go, try to see how far we could get the outsiders to agree to what we wanted and to support limitations and objections that we were working under, of which the most important one was budget.

HACKMAN: In general, how well did you work with the advisory committee? Were they of great help or did you usually have problems here?

LEWIS: Well, the advisory committees actually were very independent for the most part, but they generally supported something the Department could live with on these programs. Our dairy advisory committee supported our program, at least nominally. They didn't, you know, have a minority report to file in lieu of it, but their organizations outside kind of sat by, primarily, as I say, on the programs not being generous enough, not representing a real advance sufficient to warrant giving up the old assurances in the law that had survived through the Benson era.

HACKMAN: Do you have any observations on what the main causes were for the failure of the legislation in '61?

LEWIS: Well, we did get the Emergency Feed Grains program.

HACKMAN: I mean the big bill.

LEWIS: I think, for the most part, Congress just wasn't ready to let the detail work pass to the executive branch. Too many congressmen want to do something about a half a cent a hundredweight on grain sorghum in a particular terminal, and something about a certain kind of cotton quality that's produced in their district in Texas, and so forth, to willingly relinquish that kind of specific and detailed control to the executive branch.

HACKMAN: How effective do you think the Department's congressional effort was in '61 and then all on through the Kennedy period?

LEWIS: I think that the lobbying job was extremely effective. I think where it has broken down is in failing to generate real confidence and elan among the farmers themselves. The farmers like the Feed Grain program. It's a lot of money, and it has improved prices. But they had accepted what the government had told them for eight years under the Republicans, and now with more zip than ever by the Democrats, that surpluses were busting them. That's why the prices were low. The farmers accepted that; it had a logic that they could accept. Then suddenly the surpluses were officially announced to be over, and the ink was still wet on the newsprint when prices started going down; although the surpluses were gone, still prices went down. And that has caused a very profound disaffection among farmers, which I don't think is remedied yet, and will not soon be.

HACKMAN: Shall we go on then and talk about the '62 legislation, and could you recall what your involvement in this specifically was?

LEWIS: Well, it was in '62, actually, that we refined our supply management program for dairy. Much of what I've said earlier really applies to the '62 bill. In '61, I don't remember what was in the '61 bill with great clarity. But I think if there was anything specifically on milk, it would have been permissive. I'm just not very clear on just what . . .

HACKMAN: Right, I think you're correct; it was in '62 where the program came out with the sales quotas with penalties for over sales, and the thing was much more strictly set up and clearly spelled out. Do you recall making any particular efforts in '62 to get Senator Proxmire to support this legislation? I believe eventually he didn't.

LEWIS: Yes, Secretary Freeman and I went to see Senator Proxmire one day in early '62 it was, I believe, to deliver a copy of the legislation, as I remember, and to ask him to take the lead on the Agriculture Committee. The more senior members were kind of old-fashioned and conservative, and we felt that Proxmire had the ability and, we thought, the disposition to support our proposals. Well, he was noncommittal.

And then the Easter vacation came along, the Easter recess. I believe that was it. He went back to Wisconsin and made speeches for ten days, which we interpreted as damning the programs--the Feed Grain program, the dairy program, and all. And Secretary Freeman was quite put out, as was I. I did feel that he had not quite played fair with us by not leveling with us as to his reservations, if he had them. We certainly felt that he had agreed to consider our request that he support the Administration's proposals.

HACKMAN: Particularly in the dairy area, and also to some extent in feed grains, what problems did the predominance of people on the congressional committees who didn't represent these commodity areas create for you?

LEWIS: Well, there was a very serious problem with dairy because the farmers who have the most influence in Congress, dairy farmers,

are those who are relatively not numerous in their district, that is, the producers of milk for fluid consumption all over the country. There may be only a few hundred per district in many districts, but they're influential farmers; they have well organized cooperatives. Their cooperatives do careful, intensive work with their member of Congress, and they carry the kind of influence that an active businessman with a big interest in government policy is likely to do--quite disproportionate to his numbers. The dairy farmers in what we call the manufacturing milk area--Wisconsin, Minnesota, northeastern Iowa, and so forth--are preponderant in their area. And they may or may not have a friendly congressman, but there is only one or so congressman. It was Lester Johnson in most of our time, from the district where I grew up, incidentally, who was the champion of these manufacturing milk producers. They really represent the majority of the dairy farmers, but they both qualitatively and quantitatively lack influence in Congress. So the legislative bias is in favor of the Marketing Order program, which tends to look out for the interests of the few high-cost producers, who generally have better prices, and relegate the manufacturing milk producers to kind of a back seat.

HACKMAN: What about Senator Eugene McCarthy? How well did you work with him, or did he give the departmental programs in this area much support?

LEWIS: Yes, he did. He supported the departmental programs quite generally and I think has worked quite closely with the Department.

HACKMAN: Let's talk a little then about the National Conference on Milk and Nutrition in '62, which you played a large role in. What are your recollections of this and Senator Kennedy's appearance there?

LEWIS: Well, after having raised milk supports to \$3.40 per hundred pounds, to expire April first, 1962, we were oppressed with the volume of surplus that was piling up. And at that time also there had been a fairly sharp break in milk consumption. It was a time of talk about "radioactive fallout" contamination, and so forth, before the test ban. The milk problem was accentuated by the convenience of using milk as a general index on radiation levels. And, of course, the word "milk" was always in the publicity, even though the statistics might have been much more alarming if they had been related to lettuce, or some other things.

HACKMAN: This was all the excitement about strontium 90?

LEWIS: Strontium 90, yes. That's before this time, before the time of the Test Ban Treaty. Those problems have diminished greatly.

Well, we were concerned about the impact of the drop in consumption on surplus. If the customers wouldn't buy it, we'd get it in the form of butter, cheese, and powder. We also wanted to impress on the dairy farmers that we really did have their interests at heart and wanted

to do something to demonstrate it. So Secretary Freeman and President Kennedy agreed to having a conference on milk nutrition at which the President would perform a star role in displaying his endorsement of milk as a good safe food. And Secretary Freeman asked me to set it up, which I did. It was set up on quite short notice. We did, I think, put together a fairly respectable program.

Here again the dairy organizations--some of them--were a little bit chary of getting identified. They were afraid that it might backfire and advertise milk's unsuitability, or the question about it, emphasize the negative, rather than overcome the negative. But we had a big crowd, and Senator Kennedy drank a glass of milk on the platform. There's a picture of it right up there, and I'm grinning in the background.

We knew that the best thing in the world that could be done would be to get a picture on all the front pages of all the papers, particularly in the dairy belt, of the President swigging a glass of milk. So I took it up with the Secret Service, and they wouldn't think of it. It would be just impossible to work out the necessary logistics for clearance of a stunt like that. It would be physically impossible. So Secretary Freeman volunteered to tip off President Kennedy in the limousine on the way from the White House down to the Departmental Auditorium, where he is going to speak, that there would be a glass of milk under the podium, which I would have personally drawn and poured for him, and that if he would feel so disposed, we'd appreciate it if he'd take a drink when the cameras were looking.

Well, the President came in, and after finishing his remarks he reached down there, and there was this glass of milk, and he took a good swig of it. I saw a clipping from the Milwaukee Sentinel, which gets all over Wisconsin every morning, showing that glass of milk high in the air for the Wisconsin dairy farmers to look at. And I was very pleased.

HACKMAN: You've talked several times about the problem, well, let's say, improving the relations with these dairy representatives. Do you think anything was accomplished in the Kennedy period?

LEWIS: Well, I do think that there was a growing feeling of goodwill toward the President. I think this conference helped a great deal. Things were positive, I think, and they were on the way up. I think we had a lot to learn about how to get along with people and how to run a government, but I think we were learning. I felt that we were taking our lumps with good grace and making progress. We certainly continued to advocate expanding food consumption, both here and overseas.

The budget problem was always a big obstacle, but we still had the sense that we were going to keep trying to surmount it. And I think that's the sense the country had. I know my home community, thirty miles from the farm where I had grown up, in Wisconsin, in Eau Claire, the local businessmen sponsored a "milk capital" celebration. The leading hotel in downtown Eau Claire installed a great big Guernsey cow in the lobby, and they invited me to come out there to make a speech--you know, to kind of participate in a milking contest, for one thing, all as a follow up on the National Conference on Milk and Nutrition. And I did go out there. The feeling was very high and very favorable. I think President Kennedy made more impact,

at least on the dairy people out there at the grass roots, notwithstanding the hesitations and dubiousness of some of the people in Washington, as a result of that conference.

HACKMAN: What about the attitude of the Farmers Union on the national level toward President Kennedy and the farm programs as they developed over the '60 to '63 period?

LEWIS: Well, right after the Convention, and maybe even during the Convention, Jim Patton was sled-length for Jack Kennedy. And he jumped into the campaign with every support that he could wholeheartedly and supported the Administration fully in the early stages, throughout the time that Kennedy served.

HACKMAN: We talked a little bit awhile ago about reorganization in the Department and you expressed some of your ideas on that. What was your role in this reorganization of the ASCS in 1962, I believe, in November?

LEWIS: Well, my administrator knew that I disagreed with what he wanted to do, so he kind of kept me in the dark about what he was planning. And I was out in Wisconsin when I got a call from the Secretary's office to get right back because the Secretary wanted to talk to me about reorganization. I did get back, and I had just a few hours to review what the reorganization plan was. Essentially it would, and did, eliminate all the commodity divisions and organized everything on a functional basis--that is, one separate division would handle all the sales of milk, and corn, and rice, and peanuts, and all the rest. Another division would handle the storage. And still another division would handle the farm sign ups, you see, getting the farmers to cooperate with the program, and all that.

Now in spite of this strictly functional organization, the storage function was kept with the function of working with the farms, as far as the grain bins were concerned, because that was an important patronage element in the farmer committee in the state office operation. So that violated the functional concept.

But nevertheless I did have a day or so to do some homework on it, I made a very impassioned speech in the Secretary's office in which I said that I felt that if we were really going to see things through with the farmers in the future, we should try to organize the Department so that there would be one man in the Department who would know and be fully responsible for everything that happened to dairy; and a man who would handle feed grains, and cotton, and so forth; and that that man would be answerable to the Secretary of Agriculture if anything at all went wrong and also would be responsible for developing a comprehensive program for the interests of the people who were interested in that commodity--the farmers, the trade, all the way down to the consumers. My principal point was that what we call vertical integration is of rising importance in agriculture, and you're now going to find in the near future, that big corporations, big agglomerations of power in the private sector, are going to be dealing with commodities

all the way from top to bottom. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: I don't really have that much more here.

LEWIS: I mentioned vertical integration. I felt that if the public, if the government, were to develop the capability to really help the farmer, the man that does the work, to hold up his end in confronting these vast agglomerations of power in the trade, there would have to be a capability on the part of the government to see the whole picture. And if you're going to see it, then you've got to have somebody who's responsible for the whole picture, coordinating it, somebody short of the Secretary of Agriculture.

As it is now, there's nobody responsible for everything about anything except the Secretary of Agriculture. He has got responsibility dispersed all over the place, you see. When he wants to do something about dairy, he's got to call together a dozen people. Chances are, he never gets them together. And so you have the wildest kinds of inconsistency.

We have a General Sales Manager's office in the Foreign Agricultural Service, for example, that sold for animal feed all the dried milk that we had at a highly subsidized price. They hadn't even done ~~us~~ good intelligence work on what was happening to production levels and pricing possibilities in Europe as our domestic program people. But nothing could be done, you see, to conserve that supply in time because of the fragmentation and dispersal of responsibility. So the outcome was that we ran out of stocks and had to cut off the Food for Peace program just after the AID [Agency for International Development] people had been out, six months before, bamboozling the foreign countries to stick their necks out on school lunch programs and things of that kind.

Well, we proceeded with the reorganization as planned, and I think that my criticism has been borne out.

HACKMAN: What effect did the Billie Sol Estes affair create for you, personally, in terms of the functioning of your program in '62?

LEWIS: Well, it just happens that my particular part of the ASCS operation was a Washington staff level operation. I was not operationally responsible in the field, nor was I operationally responsible then for the buying and selling commodity operations, and storage, and so forth. I was in charge of the price support policy formulation and so forth. So Billie Sol Estes missed me on both sides. In the reorganization, however, I was put in charge of the commodity operations, this grain storage business, and so forth, which had been affected, involved in the Billie Sol Estes proposition.

The reorganization was substantially motivated by the investigation not so much because the investigation showed up deficiencies. That is, I didn't feel the reorganization really responded to the shortcomings. In fact, I think a little to the contrary. But there needed to be a display of "doing something," and this was "doing something." A reorganization just for its own sake was necessary. I would have felt that if there had been one man

responsible for formulating a cotton policy, for example, that the chances would have been better that the problem with cotton allotments could have been dealt with rationally than to have it done on a piecemeal basis, state by state, very substantially, county by county almost, and so forth. I think we could have preserved the farmer committee function but have had more responsible, more efficient administration at the national level if we had pulled together all of these loose ends and tied them to one individual, made him responsible.

HACKMAN: To what extent were you involved in the effort to get the wheat referendum passed in '63?

LEWIS: Well, again, in '63 I was concentrating particularly on milk. And other people, Schnittker and Jaenke, were primarily responsible for the wheat referendum. But I had done quite a bit of work in wheat, and I was very interested in it. I followed it as closely as I could. I was not in on the decision making, what the Republicans called the "take off," but I'd get in on the problem somewhere in mid-air, or on the landing.

One particularly interesting incident was that a day or so before the referendum was held, a paper was sent from the Department up to the President-- a memo from Secretary Freeman--to brief him for a press conference that was to be held, I think, the day after the referendum would have been held, the next morning. The timing was very close, and it was necessary to brief him in advance of the actual referendum results being known, which meant that most of the briefing had to be aimed at what to say if we should lose the referendum. The briefing paper to the President said that the Administration should make it clear that it would not support legislation if the farmers voted down the program in the referendum. And here is why it was argued we can afford to do that: because by the time the 1964 election comes around, there will have been another referendum, and as a result of the low prices expected to result from the first referendum result, the prices will have been raised, and the farmers will vote for it next time, and would, therefore, be getting good prices at election time, and everything will be hunky-dory. The farmers will have learned their lesson, and so forth.

Well, that was a fine proposition, except that it was a year off. The referendum in '63 was for the '64 crop, and that was going to be the "dollar wheat," you see. The farmers would be getting "dollar wheat" just as the '64 election was going on, not the year before. So I called the Secretary's office and got them alerted to the need to straighten that out at the White House. I went home and during the rest of that afternoon and evening prepared a statement, which I sent up to the Secretary, which he, apparently, forwarded to the President. I advocated in my statement that the Administration announce that it would consider supporting legislation, and would support legislation if it would improve farm income, not raise government costs, and not increase the surplus, I think it was. Well, those three points were made by the President in his press conference. It could have been terribly embarrassing if he had been off, if he had followed Freeman's memo. And the basis of those three points were what finally gave rise to the voluntary program.

HACKMAN: What was the response of the people here in the Department after they found out the referendum hadn't passed? Was it seriously considered that they would resist making any effort to get new legislation?

LEWIS: Yes. I think Secretary Freeman was very angry at the farmers, and he opposed any talk of an alternative program being introduced in Congress. The morning the results came in, at the staff meeting--we had a staff meeting in the morning--I talked to the Under Secretary [Charles Murphy] about the need to have a program, and I suggested that we ought to go back with the same program that the farmers had voted down, and get them to sign up for it voluntarily! I predicted we could get 90 percent of them to sign up voluntarily for about the same program they had voted down. And he kind of blinked, and he said, "Talk to me about that at lunch." So we had lunch together, and I spelled it out. And that afternoon I put my proposal in a memorandum.

Well, we discussed it informally, but the Secretary wouldn't hear about it. I never talked to him about it directly. But I did talk to [Benton J.] Ben Stong at lunch one day, Ben being then on the Senate Interior Committee staff. And I spelled it out to Ben, just verbally, that it would be an interesting thing to try. Actually, I felt that if the Democrats didn't do something like that, they would have hell to pay in the wheat belt in '64. I wanted Jack Kennedy reelected by this time. That's even before I knew that [Barry] Goldwater was going to be the candidate. And Ben thought it was a very good idea.

A day or so after that, Walter Wilcox, who was then of the Legislative Reference Service, talked to Ben about something else. And Ben very cagily says, "Say, you know." And he spelled it out, very simple. And Walter Wilcox became very absorbed and didn't pay very close attention, Ben says, to the rest of the conversation. But when it was finally over, he interrupted and he said, "Say, you know, I think that would work." So he went back and "staffed it out" and called Ben back and agreed that it would work. And the first thing you know, George McGovern called the Legislative Reference Service for a wheat plan. And Wilcox gave this to him, and McGovern introduced it, and it finally became the law. And it worked.

Now I had felt, as I saw the referendum taking shape, that the hard sell was a mistake. I have a tendency to hard sell myself, you know. But here there was a good opportunity, I thought, to present this new program, the mandatory program, as liberalizing the wheat program, easing the compulsion, and so forth, making it more voluntary, backing off from the farmers' business. The certificate was such a big incentive to cooperate that I didn't feel the penalties and highly straightlaced mandatory program was necessary. And the success of the voluntary program has demonstrated that that's the case. But both in the construction of the legislation and in the campaign itself that had been overlooked, or had been misinterpreted. And so farmers just simply reared back and repudiated the Department's heavy-handedness, I felt, in the referendum.

HACKMAN: How important a factor do you think the votes of these small fifteen-acre or less farmers were in this vote?

LEWIS: Certainly very important, very important. But you see, the fifteen-acre people were added as the concession, or the price, of getting a tighter program. But they don't need to, you know. . . . If you eliminate the obligation to support them at two dollars a bushel and run their support down to the feed equivalent, it doesn't make any difference really whether they grow corn on that land or wheat. They grow a little bit less grain, feed, in wheat than they do in corn. You know, why should the government strain? So that was sort of the structural source of the trouble. And the fifteen-acre people who had not voted in previous referenda are clearly the ones that torpedoed it, although in some of the regular commercial wheat areas a lot of the bigger farmers voted against it, too--the very same people who voluntarily signed up and went along with essentially the same program when it was offered voluntarily. They farmed the same way under the voluntary program that they'd have had to farm under the mandatory program, except that they would have had to go through more motions under the mandatory program, but substantively about the same thing.

HACKMAN: You were talking about this hard sell approach. To some extent the local ASCS committees were used to try to get support. Do you think this was successful, or should it have been used?

LEWIS: Well, I think there are two things about that. I don't think that the local committees are effective as a political force at all. I think they can be very effective and very useful in performing a straight information and education job, not to sell something but to explain something. They can be very effective in that role. Their other legitimate function, it seems to me, is a quasi-judicial function, that is, making subjective judgments about what this man's wheat yield ought to be, or what this man's acreage has been, things that simply cannot be done objectively, where you've got to make some kind of a subjective judgment. And if you can get that judgment made by people that have been elected by the people being judged, it's an extremely effective way. But these people are not able to function in a political way the way a farm organization can.

HACKMAN: Well, let's move on then and talk about the '63 legislation. What was your role in this Class-1 base program and the incentive payment that were proposed in the '63 legislation?

LEWIS: After the reorganization, I was no longer in direct charge of the dairy policy. I was actually at the side, off the track, of dairy legislative policy, but I got into it sort of in a subsidiary way. The Class-1 base I objected to because it was discriminatory against the low-cost producers, who, incidentally, are from Wisconsin and Minnesota. Undoubtedly I felt more strongly about it because it was my home base than if they had merely been right, but I do think from a public interest standpoint, their interest is the public interest. So within the Department I objected, resisted, that Class-1 base very vigorously and actually spearheaded the objections to it.

Then the so-called voluntary dairy program I also opposed because I just simply didn't think it was workable. It's possible to identify a

specific chunk of ground and determine that it isn't in corn from year to year. But you can't identify anything about a dairy farm, that you can be sure of, that is taken out of production because even if that dairy farmer has sold the cows, they may be on somebody else's farm that is not complying in the voluntary program and producing as much milk as ever. And the income may go to that same farmer, for all we know, under a different name selling to a different dairy plant. So it's virtually unfeasible, I felt, to administer a voluntary dairy program. But I felt at that time that the Department was looking for a nominal program that it could say it was supporting and that, on that condition, it would be for higher dairy income if we could get our program approved and if dairy farmers would agree to it. It was a talking position rather than really a serious effort to get legislation.

HACKMAN: In view of that, then, the Department really didn't make that much of an effort on the Hill to get this legislation through?

LEWIS: No. I don't remember what came in '63 exactly . . .

HACKMAN: Well, I think in '63 Proxmire sponsored the . . . I'm not sure.

LEWIS: The Class-1 base.

HACKMAN: And the incentive payment never made it out of the committee, I don't believe, the incentive payment plan.

LEWIS: Well, whatever the year was, the Department support for the mandatory proposal was followed by kind of half-hearted and token support for a voluntary program, to which I objected within the Department, as I also objected to the Proxmire Class-1 base.

HACKMAN: Well, that's all the questions I have. Do you have anything you'd want to comment on that I left out that you particularly participated in, or any general comments on the Kennedy Administration and agriculture?

LEWIS: Well, about all I would have to say would be, I think, speculation about what might have been. I did feel that Kennedy, although he did not know the farm business, and maybe because he did not know it, could have done some very imaginative things about farm and food policy because he would have been, as he was, free of the limitations of the specialists and could have seen food as a factor in world power, world need, world politics, and so forth, rather than as a specialized, minority group's problem. I think that's how we finally came to grips with the civil rights problem, and the war on poverty, the poverty problem. We elevated them, escalated them, beyond the concern of those directly interested and started looking at them as something--trying to see how it affects our whole interest. When the United Nations got filled up with little countries of dark-skinned people, I think it made, among other things, internationally. . . .

From the standpoint of international policy, it was impractical to have a racial segregation policy. That wasn't the only thing, but I think that is one of the things that helped to make important people, practical people--you know, these politicians that aren't going to fool around with idealistic nonsense but only the real important things--agree that civil rights was something that was a national mandate. And very much the same kind of thing with poverty. If we can't solve poverty in our own country, well, it reflects on our ability to survive in a world that is full of it.

Now that's how agricultural policy has to be regarded, too. It's not simply the province of a bunch of complaining, agrarian hicks, you know, the kind of unfortunate people that everybody feels sorry for, but thinks are old-fashioned and kind of ought to be done away with. Modern as we are, we still eat. And I feel that farm policy is still in a kind of limbo. It has not yet achieved this type of national respectability as a big problem, a big world problem, that it deserves. Even the so-called war on hunger, I feel, is--well, it doesn't reflect a genuinely rational, level-headed view of what the facts are. Kennedy, I think, more quickly than the present Administration, I feel, would have gotten a better perspective than we have yet achieved.

HACKMAN: Thank you very much.