

## CHAPTER NINE

## Aligning With the Extreme Right

*“We are probably the least selfish occupational group that there is in America. I don’t see us taking strong legislative positions where we set out to be of harm to other parts of our society. I don’t think we take extreme positions that hurt other people. We try not to.”*

— Dick Newpher, executive director, AFBF, Washington, D.C., office.

*“The district attorney should be required to institute a dependent and neglected action against any unwed mother filing a second application for benefits under Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). No AFDC payments should be made beyond the first child.”*

— Oklahoma Farm Bureau  
1999 policy manual.

*“We favor repeal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended.”*

— AFBF 1999 policy manual.

At the 1999 AFBF convention, faces of color were scarce. A few African-American staff members were present, but black or Hispanic voting delegates were notably absent on the convention floor, even though the convention was in New Mexico, a state with a significant Hispanic population.

By voice vote without debate, delegates approved a resolution calling for repeal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the cornerstone of the nation’s civil rights protection. In an interview during the convention, AFBF’S then president Kleckner claimed to know nothing of that policy plank even though Voting Rights Act repeal has been part of AFBF policies for years. “I’ve heard of the Voting Rights Act, but I don’t know that we have a position on it, either for or against it,” he said. At a news conference later, he said he could not explain why AFBF was opposed to the act or how repeal might benefit agriculture. “I’m guessing it didn’t get any discussion at all,” he said. “It usually doesn’t, and I can’t answer the question of why we have it in

there, but it probably came from a state farm bureau some years ago, and it has been in there ever since.”

Herman Cain, president of the National Restaurant Association and the only African-American to address the full convention, said he had been unaware of AFBF advocacy of repeal of the Voting Rights Act and would look into the matter.

In agreeing to a \$300 million settlement with black farmers in 1998, the U. S. Department of Agriculture acknowledged that discrimination against minority farmers is longstanding and widespread. The department agreed to pay damages to settle a lawsuit brought by thousands of black farmers who claimed the department had systematically denied them loans and other services available to white farmers.

In a chapter of his book *Dollar Harvest* titled “The Right Wing in Overalls,” Samuel Berger writes about a link in the late 1940s between the Arkansas Farm Bureau and Pappy O’Daniel’s Christian American Association, an extreme right-wing organization known for racist views. O’Daniel’s group was permitted to send literature to members of the Arkansas Farm Bureau, which worked with O’Daniel’s association to support anti-labor laws. In his book *The Corporate Reapers*, A.V. Krebs reports: “When questioned about its support of such work, (Arkansas Farm) Bureau President Ed O’Neal told a congressional committee that it wasn’t such a bad idea if farmers joined the Ku Klux Klan since every farmer should join something.”

Farm Bureau association with right-wing groups continued. Again from Berger: “In 1967,

the *New York Times* reported that ‘In several states . . . there is an increasing identity of interest and an apparent overlap in membership between the Farm Bureau and the Birch Society.’”

In 1995 the Farm Bureau joined forces with Rogelio Maduro, a crony of ultra right-wing conservative Lyndon LaRouche, to try to block Senate ratification of the global biodiversity treaty. Negotiated in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the treaty had widespread support until the Farm Bureau stepped in to oppose ratification. As a result, the United States remains the only major nation in the world that has failed to ratify.

For whatever reason, the national and state farm bureaus have supported an extensive list of conservative policies, many with no apparent connection to agriculture or even to Farm Bureau business affiliates. For example:

- In 1983, the North Carolina Farm Bureau opposed increasing penalties against individuals who hold workers in involuntary servitude — in other words, for people who keep slaves. Ten people had been convicted on slavery charges in North Carolina during the previous three years.
- The Texas Farm Bureau sought repeal of the federal minimum wage and wanted the government to cut food stamps for poor families whose children also get free lunches at school.
- The Oklahoma Farm Bureau has pressured the state to prevent teachers from discussing “so-called animal rights.” The group also called for abolition of the state’s Advisory Commission on the Status of Women. Oklahoma and other state farm bureaus and AFBF also oppose the Equal Rights Amendment.

- The Montana Farm Bureau lobbied to require that schools teach creationism on an equal basis with evolution. The bureau also wanted the state to ship convicted criminals to Mexico and promoted a resolution urging the United States to withdraw from the United Nations.

- The Maryland Farm Bureau supported a bill designating English as the state's official language.

In New Mexico, the Department of Public Safety withdrew a police training manual after the Farm Bureau objected to a passage that included wise-use groups among organizations that advocate violence. The manual, titled "The Extremist Right," was designed to educate officers about potential terrorist threats following the bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City. It pointed out, "Like other western states, New Mexico has major land use issues. Wise-use groups, anti-environmentalists and land grant activists may prove to be the most volatile and pose the greatest threat to law enforcement." The wise-use movement was defined as "a coalition of ranchers, loggers, miners and others who want federal environmental regulations repealed and who want more control of public lands given to local authorities."

The Department of Public Safety's concern was not unfounded. New Mexico is home to one of the original county-supremacy movements. Catron County's government was the first to adopt ordinances aimed at seizing control of federal land. The ordinances require federal officials to get local approval for any action affecting grazing and make it a crime for Forest Service

officials to enforce federal laws without first getting permission from the county sheriff. More than 45 western counties have followed suit. In some areas where county-supremacy and wise-use movements are active, Forest Service employees have been attacked and federal property has been damaged.

The county-supremacy movement is heir to at least parts of the philosophy of the militant Posse Comitatus, which means "power of the county." That movement, launched in the late 1960s, proclaimed county government as the highest authority in the land. According to the police training manual, Posse Comitatus took advantage of the farm crisis of the 1970s and 1980s to win recruits among bankrupt farmers. The organization advocated violent resistance to the government. In 1983, according to the manual, Posse leaders were involved in shootouts in which several federal marshals were killed or injured and a local sheriff was killed.

Wise-use groups are supporters of today's county-supremacy movement, and some have been associated with militant militia movements. Yet the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau said it was outraged by the police training manual's reference to that movement and used its influence with the governor and state lawmakers to put pressure on the state police. The New Mexico farm bureau did not let up until the Department of Public Safety agreed to withdraw the manual and recall all copies. By defending its wise-use friends, the farm bureau may have deprived law-enforcement agencies of important information about potential terrorist activities.

According to police, two recent attacks on

the offices of environmentalists in Santa Fe, New Mexico, may have been linked to one of the militant organizations described in the training manual. On March 19, 1999, a potentially deadly pipe bomb was discovered in the mailbox of Forest Guardians, a group advocating protection of wildlife and public lands. The bomb failed to go off and later was detonated by a Santa Fe police bomb squad. Police say the ball-bearing-filled pipe bomb was powerful enough to kill or seriously injure anyone nearby.

The next day, a drawing was mailed to Forest Guardians showing the name of the organization centered beneath the cross-hairs of a rifle scope. The drawing was signed with the initials M.M., which police believe to stand for the Minute Men. This shadowy group has claimed credit for other attacks, including a 1998 nighttime shotgun blast that shattered windows at the Santa Fe offices of Animal Protection of New Mexico. Before that attack, Animal Protection received a letter also signed M.M. warning, "You are approaching a point where we will hurt you. We are going to make a concerted effort to kill any wolf reintroduced into the wild and poison bison as long as you interfere with wildlife issues."

Both targeted environmental groups have supported wolf reintroduction. Forest Guardians also has filed a number of successful lawsuits leading to curbs on grazing, logging and water use on public lands and better protection of endangered species. There is no evidence that the Farm Bureau has been involved with any of the militant anti-environmental groups. But some observers believe that the bureau's extreme rhetoric may encourage attacks. "The Farm

Bureau sows the seeds of violence with its hateful rhetoric and antagonistic stance on wildlife issues," says Forest Guardians president Sam Hitt. "The Farm Bureau has created a bigoted and intolerant atmosphere in which acts of violence thrive." And nowhere is that attitude more apparent than on the issue of predator reintroduction.

#### RANCHERS AND WOLVES

*"We just don't want 'em. We don't think we need 'em. We think our technology today, with our jet planes and our transportation routes and all of the things that we've developed over 200 years, certainly prohibits the reintroduction of a specie [sic] that lived in the wildlands long ago.... It's my feeling and pretty much the Farm Bureau's that there is a place for these wolves whether it be in a zoo or a wild animal park, but certainly not out on the public range. And I don't think we should sacrifice our food supply of America being beef cattle."*

— Norm Plank, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau executive vice president.

Despite the many pressing issues in agriculture and the current economic crisis for family farmers, the Farm Bureau continues to rank opposition to wolf reintroduction as one of its top ten priorities. Defenders of Wildlife and other groups hoped to persuade the Farm Bureau to change its policy on wolves at the 1999 AFBF convention, but delegates there adopted a new resolution calling for return of the Yellowstone wolves to Canada. That plan was never a viable option, however. Interior

Secretary Bruce Babbitt told Congress in 1998 that Canada would not take the wolves back. Norm Plank's suggestion that all the wolves be placed in captivity would not work, either. According to Sydney Butler, executive director of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, zoos and wildlife parks could accommodate only a few of the wolves at most.

Defenders of Wildlife ran newspaper advertisements asserting that removing the more than 200 Yellowstone wolves would be "tantamount to a death sentence" because there is no place for the wolves to go. The Farm Bureau disputed this contention. "Farm Bureau has never advocated killing any wolves," said former AFBF president Dean Kleckner. But Montana Farm Bureau executive vice president Jake Cummins acknowledged that the wolves probably would be killed if the Farm Bureau prevailed in its legal challenge. The government "should round [the wolves] up right now and ship them back to Canada where they came from," Cummins wrote in an essay. "But they won't. They'll avoid obeying the law as long as they can by stringing out the appeal. The wolves will keep killing livestock. In the end federal agents will have to shoot the wolves they brought in and all their offspring."

At a news conference during AFBF's 1999 convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Defenders of Wildlife president Rodger Schlickeisen accused the Farm Bureau of exaggerating the threat wolves pose to ranchers. "They picked the wolf as a particular target for their rhetoric, and they have tried to inflame the farming and ranching community well beyond any reasonable measure of the problems that the wolf

represents," Schlickeisen told reporters.

AFBF'S former president Kleckner insisted that wolves and other predators cause ranchers grave economic harm. Losing even a few calves can make a huge difference in a rancher's ability to survive, Kleckner said. To hear Farm Bureau officials tell it, these predators could destroy the ranching economy. "Our membership really wonders why the federal government is spending millions of dollars putting predators into rural areas where farm and ranch families are having a real difficult time hanging on to the family ranch," said AFBF lobbyist Jon Doggett.

Although Defenders of Wildlife in the last decade has paid more than \$100,000 to compensate ranchers for livestock losses to wolves, Doggett says ranchers do not believe they can always prove, or even know for sure, that a calf has been killed by a wolf. But Defenders' northern Rockies representative, Hank Fischer, says determining whether livestock has been killed by wolves is not difficult. "Wolf kills are way down on the list of things that harm livestock, way below being struck by lightning or hit by automobiles," he adds. In fact, wolves killed only seven head of cattle in 1996, according to government reports. Domestic dogs killed nearly twice as many cattle as mountain lions, bobcats, bears and wolves combined. "We are talking about a small level of predation," Fischer says, "and if that's enough to tip the livestock industry over the edge, it has a pretty uncertain future anyway."

Department of Agriculture statistics show that in 1996, the last year for which figures are available, all predators combined killed about 117,000 head of cattle — a small number com-

pared to the 417,000 lost to bad weather and more than 2 million felled by respiratory and digestive problems. The magnitude of health-related cattle deaths surprised Farm Bureau leaders. “I’ve never heard that before,” AFBF’s then president Kleckner said in a radio interview during the 1999 convention, “and frankly, I don’t believe it.”

### BRIDGING THE CHASM

*“It’s kind of like the old saying that you take stumbling blocks and make them stepping stones. We’re the only ranch in New Mexico that came out in favor of reintroduction of the Mexican wolf because frankly we see it as more of an opportunity than a threat. I feel that the interest the wolf would bring to this area would far outweigh the dangers of it, and anyway, we’re used to getting along with coyotes and mountain lions, so I don’t see that wolves would be that much of a threat to us.”*

— Jim Winder, New Mexico rancher.

Fourth-generation rancher Jim Winder runs cattle on 100,000 acres of public and private land in southwestern New Mexico, a region where reintroduced Mexican wolves are likely to expand. And that’s just fine with Winder. “You know, they were here first, and they’re part of the land, part of the ecology,” Winder explained during a tour of his ranch. “I think we can adapt. That’s the whole idea with the wolf. You learn to live with them.”

That isn’t talk you would expect from a rancher, but Winder is convinced that his

approach to predators and to land conservation has made his ranch more profitable than others around him. Mountain lions and hundreds of coyotes inhabit the territory. Winder quit killing predators 15 years ago, and since then, he says, he has lost only two calves to coyotes. To figure out the best ways to deter attacks, Winder studied bison herding patterns. He uses herd dogs to keep cattle in larger groups so calves are better protected. Calving season is timed for spring, when cougars and coyotes have plenty of natural prey. And before the calves are born, cattle are moved away from coyote denning areas.

Winder’s Heritage Ranch is the first to win authentication from Defenders of Wildlife for predator-friendly practices. He has signed a memorandum of understanding pledging that no predators will be killed. In exchange, meat from the ranch carries an Authentic Wolf Country Beef label and sells for a premium. But more is at stake here than a few extra cents per pound for ground beef. Winder looks at what he is doing as a chance to help bridge a chasm. “We’re a very traditional lot, ranchers,” he says. “Years ago I kind of looked at where we were on our ranch and saw that every year we were doing worse financially. I saw the environmentalists as a threat.” But instead of fighting, Winder decided he would rather try to communicate. Through that experience, he came to understand that protecting the ecosystem might help save the ranch. Restoring wetlands and riparian areas, for instance, means more water available for livestock, a greater abundance of vegetation and less spent on cattle feed.

Winder now believes this ecological approach

to ranching is the only way to survive. “A lot of ranchers are seeing that now is the time to make some changes,” he says. “They realize that environmentalists are not our enemies.”

During AFBF’s 1999 New Mexico convention, several hundred Farm Bureau members attended a country dance and barbecue sponsored by Defenders and featuring Winder’s Wolf Country Beef. Many were skeptical about prospects for coexistence with wolves. But most agreed with what North Dakota rancher Bill Gackle said: “The predators are just a minor problem compared to the prices that we’re currently receiving. The predators are in no way running the farmers off the land, whereas the prices, the economy, are.”

People are eating less beef these days. A lot of ranch land has been damaged by overgrazing and other abuse and cannot sustain as many cattle as in the past. On top of that, the beef market is controlled by near-monopolies. Ranchers are in trouble, says Rocky Mountain Farmers Union president Dave Carter, but not because of wolves. “We do have some concerns about the wolf reintroduction,” he says, “but on the whole we’re more concerned about the wolves in the marketplace than the wolves up in Yellowstone.”

The National Farmers Union competes directly with the Farm Bureau but is smaller and takes a much different approach to agricultural and environmental issues. The Farmers Union is heir to an agrarian populist tradition that began around the turn of the century as a fight against usurious banking practices, unscrupulous grain dealers and market speculators. Back then, in the 1920s, Farm Bureau leaders railed against the

“radicalism” of these populists and pledged to work against any policies that might help them. Some of that old enmity still lingers. Rocky Mountain Farmers Union legislative coordinator Melissa Elliott says she has been disappointed that the Farm Bureau has not helped more with issues that make a real difference in the West. “The market is definitely a bigger problem because every independent producer is affected, and it’s literally driving people out of business,” she says. “The wolf isn’t doing that. Unfortunately we’re always on opposite side of the coin [from the Farm Bureau], and I wish that weren’t so. We’re all in the same boat. We need to be rowing in the same direction.”

#### FREE-TRADE FACADE

*“The FB is essentially lying to their producers about what the real issues are, so they are fueling the problem rather than helping to address the problem. . . . The issues of private property rights, the environment, the wolves in Yellowstone Park, do not matter if we lose our farmers and ranchers because of price fixing and predatory practices by major global corporations.”*

— Mike Callicrate, Cattlemen’s Legal Foundation.

When Mike Callicrate came to speak in Ft. Pierre, South Dakota, in 1998, more than 2,000 ranchers showed up at the town hall. Callicrate’s topic was corporate monopolies and international trade agreements that he says are undercutting U.S. cattlemen and forcing many out of business.

Callicrate runs the Cattlemen's Legal Fund, a rancher group that has taken monopolistic agribusinesses to court. The Kansas rancher says he took on the activist role reluctantly but didn't see much choice. As huge corporations took over more and more of the beef market, independent ranchers were feeling the squeeze, and Callicrate says the Farm Bureau failed to offer ranchers any help. "I think it is sinful what the Farm Bureau has done," he said in an interview. "To me, it's almost a fraud to even call it a farm organization."

Callicrate's group has petitioned the U.S. International Trade Commission for an investigation into unfair trading practices by both Canada and Mexico. It also has sought an investigation of alleged price manipulation by big meat packers. Callicrate says the Farm Bureau refused assistance in both cases.

New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau executive vice president Norm Plank agrees that the time has come for the Farm Bureau to take a hard look at ways to break up agricultural monopolies. But in an interview he complained, "We're limited on how much court time we can spend. It's very, very costly. . . . We are limited on our funding, so we have to pick and choose."

"You've got to be very careful when you start monkeying with the free-enterprise system," adds the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau's Erik Ness. "There are some things wrong with it, and this may be one of them. And we are working to get the cattle industry more spread out."

Just as in the hog business, Farm Bureau agricultural cooperatives are closely tied to the nation's biggest beef packing corporations. Farm Bureau affiliate Growmark is in business with

ADM, which owns 14 percent of IBP, the nation's largest beef packer. ConAgra, the second largest packer, runs a joint export facility with ADM. Farmland National Beef, the fourth largest, is part of Farmland Cooperative, which has extensive ties to several Farm Bureau-linked co-ops. Together, these four largest packers control 79 percent of the nation's beef supply.

Bill Christisen, president of the National Family Farm Coalition, echoes Callicrate's frustration in dealing with the Farm Bureau. The coalition, which represents 100,000 farming families in 35 states, often finds itself on the opposite side of issues from AFBF. "We're concerned that the Farm Bureau continues to antagonize environmental groups rather than focusing on the causes of low farm prices," Christisen told reporters at a news conference during the 1999 AFBF convention. The coalition has made a number of proposals to break up corporate agricultural monopolies, Christisen says, but all have failed. "AFBF leaders lobbied to kill those measures," he says. "The truth is, whenever we try to implement better agricultural policies, our worst opponent is almost always the AFBF."

The Farm Bureau's primary response to the economic difficulties faced by ranchers and farmers can be summarized in the words "free trade." Aggressive export strategies are seen as the key. According to AFBF leaders, increased demand "is the future of the U.S. cattle and beef industry." The Farm Bureau has become such a strong believer in free trade that in January, 1999, AFBF took the unprecedented step of calling for normalized trade relations with Cuba. The Texas Farm Bureau followed up in September, 1999, by send-

ing a trade mission to Cuba. “If full trade could be developed quickly, or allowed with Cuba, it could be a billion dollars in sales very quickly with another billion in sales down the road in a few more years,” said AFBF president Kleckner at a convention news conference. On top of that, AFBF delegates agreed to a proposal for expanded trade with China and Vietnam. Curiously, they also reaffirmed support for a longstanding Farm Bureau condemnation of Communism.

Besides opening trade with Communist nations, the Farm Bureau also pins great hope on

“fast-track” negotiations aimed at speeding up the process of concluding free-trade agreements with other governments. But whether these aggressive free-trade strategies will help independent producers as much as they help multinational agribusinesses remains unclear. Several family-farm groups oppose fast-track negotiations, contending that free-trade agreements have hurt farmers. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-North Dakota) contends that this country’s free-trade agreements with Canada turned a \$1.1 billion agricultural surplus into a \$400 million deficit.