

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Address on Agricultural Adjustment Act | 1935

May 14, 1935

I am glad to welcome you to Washington. We can think of this occasion as a kind of surprise birthday party because it was exactly two years and two days ago that the Agricultural Adjustment Act became a law. I pretty well remember the occasion over there in the Executive Offices, and the fine group of representatives of farmers from every part of the country who stood around me when I signed the Act.

After that took place, and in record time, you and thousands of other farmers took hold. You set up the machinery to control your affairs and you put the new law to work.

I remember, too, the many -- what shall I call them -- the high and mighty people who said you could not do it, who said it was no use for you to try, intimating clearly that their only remedy to improve your situation was to let the sheriffs' sales go on. That was the old familiar way, the high and mighty way of balancing farm production with demand. Those people, my friends, did not understand and many of them do not understand today that, if the farm population of the United States suffers and loses its purchasing power, the people in the cities in every part of the country suffer of necessity with it. One of the greatest lessons that the city dwellers have come to understand in these past two years is this: Empty pocketbooks on the farm do not turn factory wheels in the city.

Let us go back for a minute to that spring of 1933 when there was a huge carryover. Let us take some examples. There was a carryover of almost thirteen million bales of cotton and a price, because of that carryover, of six cents a pound. Henry Wallace insists it was six and a half cents a pound, but I know that I got only four and a half cents for my cotton. You and I know what six cent cotton means to the purchasing power of the Cotton Belt. And you and I remember that there was a huge carryover of tobacco and that the price of tobacco during the preceding six months was the lowest on record for a great many years. Wheat had a carryover of nearly four hundred million bushels and a price of thirty-five cents on the farm or less; corn, a price of fifteen cents a bushel on many farms -- and I knew some farmers who sold it at nine cents; hogs, a price of three cents a pound.

You and I know what those figures meant in the way of purchasing power for forty million Americans.

When we came down here to Washington that spring we were faced with three possible ways of meeting the situation. The first method that was suggested involved price fixing by Federal decree. We discarded that because the problem of overproduction was not solved thereby.



The second plan was to let farmers grow as much as they wanted of everything, and to have the Federal Government then step in, take from them that portion of their crop which represented what we called the exportable surplus and, in their name and on their behalf, dump this surplus on the other Nations of the world. We discarded that plan for a good many reasons and one was because the other Nations of the world had already taken steps to stop dumping. From that time on, with increasing frequency they were raising their tariffs, establishing quotas and clamping on embargoes against just that kind of proposition. And that is why we discarded that.

Therefore, we came to the third plan -- a plan for the adjustment of totals in our major crops, so that from year to year production and consumption would be kept in reasonable balance with each other, to the end that reasonable prices would be paid to farmers for their crops and unwieldy surpluses would not depress our markets and upset the balance.

We are now at the beginning of the third year of carrying out this policy. You know the results thus far attained. You know the present price of cotton, of wheat, of tobacco, of corn, of hogs and of other farm products today. Further comment on the successful partial attainment of our objective up to this time is unnecessary on my part. You know.

I want, for a moment, to emphasize that word "adjustment." It is almost a forgotten word just as some of you, once upon a time, were forgotten men. As you know, a great many of the high and mighty, with special axes to grind, have been deliberately trying to mislead people who know nothing of farming by misrepresenting -- no, why use a pussyfoot word? -- by lying about the kind of farm program under which this Nation is operating today.

A few leading citizens have gone astray from other causes -- such as ignorance. I must admit that. For example, a few years ago in the countryside where I live, I was driving with a prominent city banker. Everything was brown. The leaves were off the trees. And all of a sudden we passed a beautiful green field. He asked me what it was. I told him it was winter wheat. He turned to me and said, "That is very interesting. I have always wondered about winter wheat. What I don't understand is how they are able to cut it when it gets all covered up with snow."

The other example was down in Georgia. An editor of a great metropolitan paper was visiting me down there in the summertime when I showed him my farm with 40 or 50 acres of cotton, when the cotton was nearly grown but before the bolls had formed. Looking out over the cotton fields he said to me:

"What a large number of raspberries they grow down here."



Well, raspberries was right. Because, at four and a half cents a pound for cotton his mistake was, perhaps, a natural one.

I was speaking to you about that word adjustment. I think it is your duty and mine to continue to educate the people of this country to the fact that adjustment means not only adjustment downward but adjustment upward. If you and I agree on a correct figure for a normal carryover in a basic crop, it means that if we have a bumper crop one year we will, by mutual consent, reduce the next year's crop in order to even up that carryover. At the same time, if we get a short crop in a given year, you and I agree to increase the next year's crop to make up the shortage. That is exactly what we are doing in the case of wheat this year.

Yes, it is high time for you and for me to carry, by education, knowledge of the fact that not a single program of the A.A.A. contemplated the destruction of an acre of food crops in the United States, in spite of what you may read or what you may have been told by people who have special axes to grind.

It is high time for you and for me to make clear that we are not plowing under cotton this year -- that we did not plow it under in 1934 and that we only plowed some of it under in 1933 because the Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed by that Congress at that famous Special Session after a huge crop of cotton was already in the ground.

It is high time for us to repeat on every occasion that we have not wastefully destroyed food in any form. It is true that the Relief Administrator has purchased hundreds of thousands of tons of foodstuffs in order to feed the needy and hungry who have been on the relief rolls in every part of the United States.

The crocodile tears shed by the professional mourners of an old and obsolete order over the slaughter of little pigs and over other measures to reduce surplus agricultural inventories deceive very few thinking people in this country, and least of all the farmers themselves.

I have always supposed, ever since I was able to play around, that the acknowledged destiny of a pig is sausage, or ham, or bacon or pork. It was in those forms -- as sausage, ham, bacon or pork -- that millions of pigs were consumed by vast numbers of needy people who otherwise would have had to do without them.

Let me make one other point clear for the benefit of the millions in cities who have to buy meats. Last year the Nation suffered a drought of unparalleled intensity. If there had been no Government program, if the old order had obtained in 1933 and 1934, that drought on the cattle ranges of America and in the corn belt would have resulted in the marketing of thin cattle, immature hogs and the death of these animals on the range and on the farm, and if the old order had been in effect those years, we would have had a vastly greater shortage than we face today.



Our program -- we can prove it -- saved the lives of millions of head of livestock. They are still on the range, and other millions of heads are today canned and ready for this country to eat.

I think that you and I are agreed in seeking a continuance of a national policy which on the whole is proving successful. The memory of old conditions under which the product of a whole year's work often would not bring you the cost of transporting it to market is too fresh in your minds to let you be led astray by the solemn admonitions and specious lies of those who in the past profited most when your distress was greatest.

You remember and I remember that not so long ago the poor had less food to eat, and less clothes to wear, at a time when you had practically to give away your products. Then the surpluses were greater, and yet the poor were poorer than they are today when you farmers are getting a reasonable, although still an insufficient, price.

I have not the time to talk with you about many other policies of your Government which affect the farm population of the country. I have not the time, although I would like to do it, to go into the practical work of the Farm Credit Administration which, in all of its ramifications, has saved a million farms from foreclosure and has accomplished the first great reduction in exorbitant interest rates that this country has ever known.

It is because what you stand for is so just and so wholly reasonable that no one today has had the temerity to question the motives of this grand "march on Washington." It is a good omen for Government, for business, for bankers and for the city dwellers that the Nation's farmers are becoming articulate and that they know whereof they speak.

I hope you have enjoyed your stay in Washington. Seeing your Government at first hand, seeing the immensity of government which, after all, is not surprising when you think of the immensity of the country -- seeing all that at first hand, you have a better idea why sometimes our efforts in the National capital seem lumbering and slow and complicated. On the other hand, You may have seen, in this visit of yours, that we are moving faster, that we are accomplishing more practical results than you have been led to believe by the high and mighty gentlemen of whom I have spoken.

We haven't quite got the engine tuned up yet but it is a mighty fine engine. I think after it has run a total of about a thousand miles it will be the best engine we have ever had.

I want to thank you for your patience with us, your Government. I want to pledge to you not only our wholehearted cooperation as you go forward, but our continued deep interest in a problem that is not just a farmer's problem because, as I have said before, your prosperity is felt in every city home, in every bank and in every industry in the land.



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