

Opinions

Farm exports take nose dive

RALEIGH -- When Republican presidential hopeful Jack Kemp visited Raleigh in September, he warned that passage of protectionist trade legislation by the Congress would certainly prompt foreign retaliation which would hurt North Carolina farmers.



Watching
By Paul T. O'Connor

When Agriculture Commissioner Jim Graham was told of Kemp's remarks, he responded, "There's no such thing as free trade." If Kemp wants proof, he only need look at the recent record of North Carolina farm exports. They've been dropping dramatically.

The state's three major agricultural exports in dollars are tobacco, soybeans and feed grain. In 1982, those three commodities combined for \$1.04 billion worth of exports from North Carolina. In 1984, they combined for \$918 million. That's a drop of \$86 million. In all, exports were down \$188 million in 1984 from those 1982 levels.

Graham adds that the agricultural embargoes of the Nixon and Carter administrations have also hurt exports. "We lost markets we never regained," he said.

Charles Elks, state agriculture marketing director, lists the high value of the American dollar as another impediment to farm exports. For example, a good London market had been developed for North Carolina sweet potatoes. When prices rose in 1981, the market dropped but should have rebounded with the bumper crop, and lower prices, of 1982. But by that time the dollar had begun to soar against the English pound, and North Carolina sweet potatoes were just too expensive for the English. That market has never recovered, Elks said.

Elks says the recent drop in the value of the American dollar may be helping farm exports but that initial indications are that 1985 will not be much better than 1984.

While farm exports are way down, Elks says they are still very important to the state's agricultural economy. He's concerned that protectionist legislation would hurt the very countries where North Carolina is developing new farm markets, that is, the Pacific Rim nations of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and Hong Kong.

The agriculture department places all North Carolina farm products into 16 commodity classifications. In nine, exports dropped in 1984 from 1983 levels. In the seven categories where exports increased, only feed grain increased more than a few million dollars.

Graham says the exports drop can be tied to unfair foreign competition. "Simply stated, North Carolina farmers have to compete with people who don't play by the same rules we have to abide by." He said farm subsidies provided by the European Common Market were among the biggest problems state farmers face.

Compare 1984 exports to years other than 1983 and things look much worse. Only cotton exports were higher in 1984 than in 1982. All 15 other commodities saw significant drops. Feed grain sales abroad in 1984, for example, were only 54% of what they had been in 1982. Cotton was actually down from 1983 and the foreign market is expected to be bad again this year, according to agriculture officials.

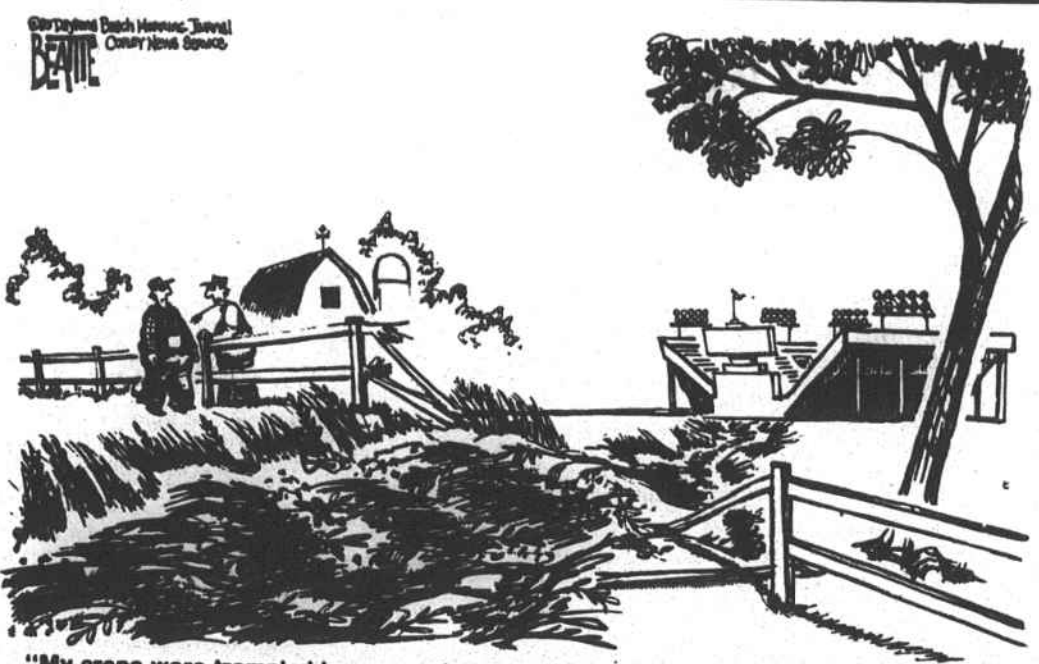
Foreign countries also play hardball when they learn of steps the U.S. might take, Graham said. When California grape growers sought a tariff on wine imports, for example, several wine exporting European countries quickly let soybean producing states like North Carolina know that there would be retaliation in the form of reduced soybean imports.

... Letters continued

(Continued from page 2B)
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Letters Policy
Letters to the editor are encouraged and welcomed. Writers should keep letters as short as possible. Names, addresses and telephone numbers should be included and all letters must be signed. Names will be printed; however, other information will be kept confidential. We reserve the right to edit letters for good taste and brevity. Letters should be received by *The News-Journal* by noon on the Monday of the publication week.



"My crops were trampled by a crowd of people on their way to the Farm Aid concert..."

Forecasts are for dry winter

The official U.S. weather forecast for the rest of the year is for a dry, warm east, cold weather in the Rockies, wet in the Mid-south and Midwest.
Dry warm weather -- supposed to extend from Maine to Florida and as far west as the eastern mountains -- could be a mixed blessing. While most welcome a warm fall, the eastern seaboard needs rain. Hurricane Gloria was a blessing in this regard. But more is needed.
A somewhat different weather forecast is offered by the *Old Farmers Almanac*, which predicts an early and cold winter for much of the nation. Thus those in the East, at least, can choose between two forecasts - and probably most hope for a warm fall as expected by government forecasters, to save on heating bills.



Cliff Blue
People and Issues

Official Weather Bureau forecasts, however, have an accuracy record of only sixty or seventy percent. Mother Nature can, and often does, surprise the experts. That's why weather is always a fascinating subject.
CAR SALES ... Domestic car sales, continuing on a spectacularly high level because of rebates and incentives, set new records for late September and for the month as a whole, according to industry reports recently.

YORKTOWN -- 1781 ... In 1781, the commander of the largest British army on American soil, Lord Cornwallis, after marching through the Carolinas and into Virginia from Charleston took refuge in fortified Yorktown. He hoped to receive reinforcements from the sea.

This was the last major British effort to win a victory against American colonists, who had begun fighting for freedom in the mid-seventies. Earlier campaigns to the north had failed.

General Washington moved to attach Cornwallis at Yorktown after a French fleet blockaded the Chesapeake Bay. Washington also had with him French troops, France then being at war with England.

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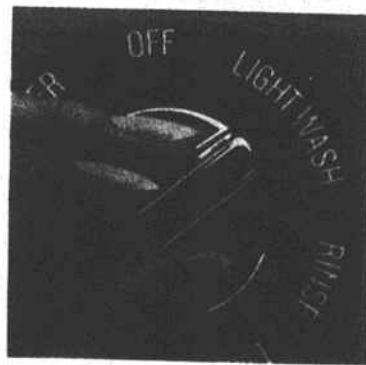
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