

New Farm Program: Questions And Answers For Area Farmers

(Editors Note: The Agricultural Act of 1970 provides the basis for farm programs on cotton, wheat and feed grains. In a recent article, Dr. Charles Pugh, extension economist at North Carolina State University, answered questions on the contents of the new program. This week, Dr. Pugh answers questions on the implications of the program in typical North Carolina situations.)

Q—Many farmers suffered from corn leaf blight during 1970 and have increased their plantings of wheat or small grain in the fall of 1970 to rebuild their feed supplies. Will this fall-seeded small grain be counted as feed grains?

A—What can be substituted for feed grains for purposes of program participation. Barley will not be considered in the feed grain program and may not be used to preserve their allotment or base history. Farmers

who substantially expanded fall-seeded small grain may have a problem in participating in the 1971 program if their expansion of small grain did not leave them enough land to use in the set-aside program next spring. Furthermore, if farmers seeded barley in the fall of 1970 expecting it would not be considered as feed grain for program purposes, they may wish to double-crop with grain sorghum in the late spring of 1971 in order to preserve feed grain history.

Q—Aren't there different approaches used in the 1970 Act compared to the programs used during the 1960's where farmers were paid for the diversion of

land from the production of specific crops?

A—Here are some of the major differences:

1. The new program does not offer specific diversion payments. However, price support payments are available only to farmers participating in the new program.
2. A farmer must plant cotton to get cotton program payments. However, it is not necessary to plant to get payments on feed grains or what under the new program.
3. Under the previous programs, farmers may have designated certain fields as the diverted acreage and kept these same

fields out of production for several years. A feature of the new program is that the acreage set-aside by the participants must be cropland that has been harvested in the last three years. However, there are exceptions to this requirement when no crop has been harvested on the entire farm within the last three years. Check with ASCS if these exceptions are important in your case. This may mean that fields which have been diverted under previous programs for several years may not be eligible to be considered in the set-aside.

4. In general, the new program allows the farmer the freedom to plant whatever he chooses on land remaining after the set-aside and conserving base.

Q—Does this new program directly affect peanuts, tobacco and other quota crops?

A—No, the tobacco and peanut programs stand on their own. However, farmers should recognize that the set-aside provisions of the feed grain, wheat and cotton program mean that some cropland must be retired from crop production. In some cases, this may put some pressure on the total cropland available for remaining crops, even allotted crops.

Q—Suppose an allotment holder, who has essentially retired, has depended upon payments

from previous voluntary diversion programs for a significant portion of his income. What might such a person do, if he is interested in preserving his history of allotments?

A—If such a farmer does not have the equipment to actively farm such property on his own, he may wish to rent out the farm in order that the base history may be preserved. Another option is to manage the crops with maximum use of custom machine hire. Unless someone actively farms the base allotments, it would be necessary for the allotment holder to forego program payments to preserve the farm history. Some have char-

acterized the change in philosophy of the new program as being one in which farmers are not paid from government programs for not farming.

Q—Suppose circumstances such as equipment shortages or fear of repeated corn leaf blight make it difficult for a farmer to plant enough corn next spring to preserve his feed grain base?

A—The required acreage might be planted to grain sorghum.

Q—Does this type of program suggest that North Carolina or the South might, in the long run, lose any of its relative share of the national feed grain base?

A—Obviously, the result depends upon the extent to which farmers plant enough to preserve the base history. However, there is some reason to be concerned on this point inasmuch as the program seems to be designed to foster specialized types of agricultural production. For example, there is no longer any penalty assessed against the farmer who wants to exceed his cotton allotment, if he is willing to reduce other crops. The farmer who does not find feed grains to be as profitable as other crops may well lose base history over time. In some parts of the United States, where feed grains are clearly among the more profitable crops, every effort will be made to fully preserve feed grain base histories.

Q—What are the implications of loss of base or allotment to real estate values?

A—Under present provisions there is no means to transfer feed grain bases between farms; therefore, they do not have any identifiable market value unless the farm land on which they are located is sold. However, in the case of cotton, allotments can be leased or sold. Under the lease or sale of cotton allotments, there have been small cash values to the allotment. The release and reapportionment program is continued with the 1971 cotton program. This feature may assist in preserving history.

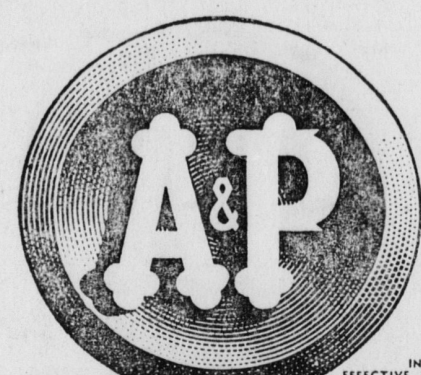
Q—Isn't loss of cotton allotment history especially crucial in areas outside the prime production areas?

A—Yes, particularly if farmers do not carefully study the requirements for preserving history. For example, under previous cotton programs one could plant as little as one tenth of an acre every three years and preserve his full allotment history. This is no longer true under the new program.

Q—What does the program suggest with respect to potential expansion of soybeans?

A—Expansion of soybeans by farmers wishing to participate in the program is somewhat limited because soybeans cannot be substituted for feed grains. Furthermore, the minimum set-aside requirements may reduce the remaining cropland for nonallotted crops such as soybeans. In summary, a substantial part of the answer on long-range increases in soybeans in such regions of North Carolina and the South rests on how many people decide to not protect their base histories and forego program payments on feed grain and wheat and plant their acreage to other crops such as soybeans.

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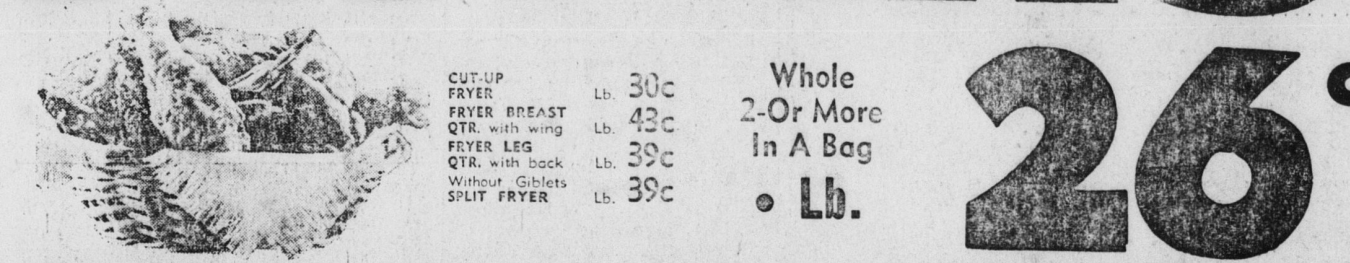
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Spec. Adams earned the award for meritorious service as a driver with the battalion's Company B.

He entered the Army in August 1969 and completed basic training at Ft. Bragg, N. C.

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