

Eric Orr
Federal Programs
Canton, Mississippi

September 12, 1964

WEEKLY REPORT

The Farmers' League meeting held at Mary Magdalene Church on Wednesday, September 9, witnessed a small victory for Federal Programs. Robert Hodges, the county ASCS man, spoke of current farming problems. His easy manner established a firm rapport with the farmers. Mr. Guy Leach, the county FIA man, came along to hold his hand. I say this because Mr. Hodges had refused to speak for the last six weeks. His sudden change of heart was in part due to the pressure applied by two ASCS agents investigating a complaint directed at Hodges' refusal (this complaint was sent from our office to the Administrator of the ASCS in Washington). This method of complaint and praise through Washington is part of the Federal Programs scheme.

Mr. Leach, who was helpful from the start and spoke to the Farmers' League in the early formative stages, was rewarded by a letter of commendation sent from our office to the President and the Secretary of Agriculture; he later received complimentary replies from both of these. So when Mr. Williams, President of the League, asked Hodges to come to the meeting he mentioned the letter of praise Leach had received from the White House. It was probably the constellation of these pressures that affected the change in Mr. Hodges.

During the meeting I asked Mr. Hodges if he would give us the boundaries of the Community Committees. He agreed, and the next day he designated the boundaries. These are very important because this is the year they were changed all over the state. The old average of farms per community was 117; this has been changed to 224. The effect on the number and size of the communities is evident. In Madison County, the number of communities was reduced from sixteen to eight.

In addition, Mr. Hodges announced he would go on the radio Fridays at 1:55 with a five-minute broadcast to the farmers. There is also a county-wide mass meeting sponsored by the various agricultural agencies at the Court House Saturday, September 19 from 10:00 A.M. to 12 Noon. All farmers are invited. The governmental meeting is a testimony to the pressure tactics employed by Federal Programs.

After the meeting I met with Mr. Hodges and suggested an accommodation might be reached about Negroes on the ASC committee. I told him our goal was not to take over, only to be represented. If we placed five men on the County Committee it would hamper the effectiveness of the board. He agreed this would be a good idea.

The Chamber of Commerce met the evening of September 9 at Asbury Church. The meeting was attended by the key people, but they were hamstrung because no option has been put on the land. This action was to have been taken by a committee which will have to decide for itself just how this will be done. We adjourned early and set the next meeting for Tuesday evening, September 15, at Mrs. Washington's house. I suggested to Mrs. Washington that she and Mr. Robinson personally telephone the people to get them to the meeting. It is hoped that a decision on the land will have been made and we can go ahead with the incorporation work.

A new interview form was drawn up by Larry Telles, a graduate student with experience in social work. Apparently, Carol Cross is not going to come through. The interview is short and can be handled by local people with a little training. This survey is primarily economic; attached to it is a welfare questionnaire which can be used if applicable.

As for welfare, it seems that a coordinated state-wide effort is the only way to approach this problem. Mississippi, like many other states, simply is not willing to put into the welfare program the amount of money necessary to make it a contribution to the general economic condition of the state. In order to change this situation, activities will have to be carried on throughout the state simultaneously.

We have found that in cases where people are obviously qualified (according to state programs) and can prove it, they are getting welfare aid. Most of the cases which are refused aid involve extenuating circumstances (questions as to degree of disability or value of property owned) which exist elsewhere in the country. In order to get a true picture of the amount of discrimination in welfare, we must obtain information on welfare services in the white community; this might be done through the white folks project.

In the meanwhile, we are going to train some local people to do these interviews, with the hope that our experience will be helpful in planning a state-wide campaign as well as in activities in Madison County.

The remaining part of the week was spent in organizing for a pre-election meeting to nominate a man for Community Committee man from Flora. The procedure was to arrange for a church through Clarence Taylor, a local man who is on the Board of Directors of the Farmers' League. The meeting will be on Monday 14th so that announcements made on Sunday in the churches will be effective. Ebbiss and I canvassed the area for three days, hitting all the farmers we could find. James Mays worked with us on Saturday morning. We plan to go out Sunday from early morning to late afternoon, and to see deacons we could not contact before. It is a good idea to explain it to a deacon who will have it announced in church. We also passed out a short explanation of the election and this will be enclosed with the report.