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Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D. Mont.)

Wheat Marketing Quota Referendum

1957

The farmers of the United States will be asked to make an important decision on June 20 of this year. They will be asked to cast their vote for or against what could easily be a major influence in the degree of prosperity they are to share in next year. Admittedly the small farmers are not enjoying any great prosperity at this time but a negative vote on this referendum would be detrimental to farmers' economy. A yes vote in the 1958 wheat referendum could benefit the average wheat farmer between \$7 or \$9 per acre. If this benefit is to be realized two-thirds of all wheat farmers must vote in favor of continued wheat quotas.

We all know what will happen if the quotas are turned down. The wheat growers will then plant more than their acreage allotment and will receive no price supports and will not be eligible for participation in the Soil Bank Programs. If allotments are maintained wheat farmers will be at least guaranteed 50% of parity supports and Soil Bank participation.

The farmers are finding it rough financially and every little bit helps, particularly, since the Presidential veto of the 1956 Farm Bill, and the Secretary of Agriculture's recent announcement putting wheat supports and marketing quotas at the minimum level allowed by law.

The farmers face a difficult choice by I do believe the farmers will benefit the most from the wheat quota system.

Again this year the over-all picture of the farm situation is none too bright despite what the Secretary of Agriculture says the economic welfare of the farmers is still being tossed back and forth like a football.

Farm prices are 15% below the level prevailing in January 1953 when President Eisenhower took office. Farm surpluses are nearly three times as large as they were in January 1953. The Federal Government has spent more in the first 4 years of the Eisenhower Administration than in the preceeding 20 years.

Yet he thinks that things are getting better for the farmer. The farm family income has dropped 3-1/2 billion between 1952 and 1956. At the same time farm production costs are going up. The family farm has long played an important part in the economic and social welfare of our country but I fear that the family farm future is being threatened. Between 1952 and 1956 the total number of farms has decreased by 460,000. During this 4 year period the farm debt rose 3.3 billion and the farm foreclosure rate doubled. Since 1952 farm credit interest rates rose 108% over the 1947 and 1949 level.

We can not afford to let this decline continue and the approval of wheat quotas will at least insure a somewhat better gross return per acre in 1958.

We must remember that we are fighting against the possible elimination of the farm program and we do not want to give the Secretary of Agriculture a strong argument to support his recommendation to eliminate commodity support.

As I have said on previous occasions the stability of the American economy depends on the prosperity and security of the farmer. Until something better comes along I feel that a high price support program is the best stabilizer available.

In the interest of our farm economy and the welfare of the nation I urge all wheat farmers large and small to vote yes on June 20 - in favor of wheat marketing quotas.

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