

FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1975

Congress OF THE UNITED STATES,
TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT BOARD,
OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Technology Assessment Board met at 2:30 p.m., pursuant to notice, in room 324, Russell Senate office Building, Hon. Hubert H. Humphrey (member, Technology Assessment Board) presiding.

Present: Senator Humphrey.

Staff present: Mr. Emdio Q. Daddario, director; Mr. Daniel V. De Simone, deputy director; Mr. J. B. Cordaro, food program manager; Dr. Walter W. Wilcox, consultant; Ms. Ellen Terpstra, research associate; Ms. Ann Woodbridge, administrative assistant.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

I see we have my friend, Don Paarlberg here with us today. We are anxious to hear from you.

Dr. Paarlberg, you know what the purpose of our hearing is, namely to look at the system of agriculture information gathering and analysis.

Dr. PAARLBERG. Right.

Chairman HUMPHREY. We had a productive hearing yesterday and we gained a good deal of information from our witnesses. Today, we have a number of representatives of USDA.

Dr. Paarlberg, you are Director of Agricultural Economics. Yesterday one of our witnesses indicated to us that it would be most helpful to have the entire information service of our Department of Agriculture under the overall supervision of the Economic Research Service of the Department of Agriculture.

You have a prepared statement which will be made part of the record. Would you please go ahead and summarize it for us.

Dr. PAARLBERG. Well, I'll just talk to you from the statement, Senator Humphrey.

Chairman HUMPHREY. All right.

STATEMENT OF DR. DON PAARLBERG, DIRECTOR, AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Dr. PAARLBERG. First of all, I would like to introduce some of our men from the Economic Research service who are here; John Stovall and Gaylord Worden, and Bill Gusser, and Dave Hume will introduce some of his people when you hear from him.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Fine.

Dr. PAARLBERG. In my statement, Senator Humphrey, I am commenting on a number of the major recommendations in the study.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Yes; this is the draft proposal that we have.

Dr. PAARLBERG. Quite so. And I will comment just very briefly and then follow whatever particular interest you may have.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Fine.

Dr. PAARBERG. Now, the first two recommendations in this draft report have to do with providing better analytical capability for the Congress with regard to information and statistical services, and we support the idea, of course. The analytical capability of the Congress should be enhanced and we will work with the congress in any effort directed to that end.

The second major topic in the report has to do with the problem of obsolete data series; and the point made there is well taken. Agriculture changes rapidly and it is important to keep our statistical series updated, and some of them are frankly a bit out of date.

We have had the review committees come in and work with us on this from the American Agricultural Economic Association, and the American Statistical Association. We have reviewed several of our specific series, particularly the farm income series. We are updating the definition of a farm which I think will bring us more current with regard to the present nature of the farm. We have worked with the Bureau of Census on that.

The third, major topic, Senator Humphrey, has to do with the timeliness and the reliability of data, and in this recommendation the question is raised regarding the agricultural census.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Yes.

Dr. PAARLBERG. Including the possible transfer of that function from the Bureau of Census to the statistical reporting service. Now, we consider the agricultural census enormously important, and we frankly feel that it has not been given the importance that it deserves in the Bureau of Census, and there has been much delay in coming out with the data.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Do you work on the questions for the agricultural census ?

Dr. PAARLBERG. Yes; we do.

Chairman HUMPHREY. In other words, you have professional input with the Census Bureau?

Dr. PAARLBERG. Yes; we do.

Chairman HUMPHREY. As you know, we receive a number of complaints from farmers out home on this. They're concerned about this probing into their private affairs, because you ask questions as to the size of the farm, the value, and all that sort, of thing. In fact, this was a topic of considerable discussion in our legislature in the State of Minnesota, and I believe they passed some resolution concerning it. I'm not positive, I know there was a resolution to call upon the Census Bureau to do away with that kind of question. But you look upon it as a vital part of the economic and social data that you need?

Dr. PAARLBERG. Yes; we do. We think that it could be improved and could be made more timely, and the questionnaires could be made

more brief if they were targeted at the particular groups that must respond. We think it would be possible to update the techniques and use a probability sampling technique.

We are not ambitious to take over that service. If the Census could be given greater importance, and brought out more quickly, we would be very happy to see it stay where it is. But if it is not being afforded the importance it deserves, then frankly we would look with favor on seeing that it was afforded that importance.

Chairman HUMPHREY. When you say the importance, are you speaking about the timeliness of it?

Dr. PAARLBERG. No, the time for processing.

Chairman HUMPHREY. You mean it needs to be processed more quickly?

Dr. PAARLBERG. Right.

Chairman HUMPHREY. This is something we might want to write to the Department of Commerce about. I would suggest we at least inquire of the Department of Commerce whether or not they would be willing to give it a higher priority.

Dr. PAARLBERG. On the recommendation in the report with regard to their information on fertilizer—this is a very important question, of course, and we have tried to improve our work in this area. There is an interagency fertilizer task force recently constituted, and they are focusing more attention on the subject. We work with TVA and the FAO, and we think we have improved our work in this area.

The Statistical Policy Division of the OMB is working to bring about a better coordination in that area. We think we're making progress in that area.

My final comments are on recommendations 10, 11, and 12 of the report. These refer to ways of making basic, long-term improvements in the foreign agriculture information system, and we are in accord with all three of these recommendations.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Are you aware that in the Foreign Assistance Act we have some provisions for the International Fertilizer Center and in Huntsville, and the TVA area?

Dr. PAARLBERG. I'm generally aware of that, yes.

Chairman HUMPHREY. We have made a recommendation of authorization of funds for our contribution to the International Fertilizer Center. Senator Sparkman has taken a great interest in that.

Dr. PAARLBERG. Well, we are in accord with your recommendation there regarding improving our foreign agriculture information systems as a matter of importance to both Dave Hume, who is Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service, and Quentin West, of the Economic Research Service, and Administrator of that agency, who has responsibility for much of the analysis in that area.

And there I'll stop, and perhaps you'll want to hear from these other gentlemen.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Yes; I still want, to ask all of you some questions, and maybe we should just go down the line first. How shall we proceed?

Dr. WEST. Have has a time problem.

Chairman HUMPHREY. Dave, would you like to go ahead?