

In Douglas County ...

Farmers in Douglas County have just begun to organize behind the American Agriculture movement. On December 27 over a hundred farmers participated in a tractor parade down Massachusetts Street. The parade was followed by the first organizing meeting.



But no clear leadership or plan of action has emerged. Those who tend to support the strike seem to be waiting to see what their neighbors plan to do. No single person has stepped forward to lead the movement in the county.

I.J. Stoneback, as the current National Farmers Organization president and former county commissioner, has been a leader in the rural community for over 20 years. Although he arranged the first farmers meeting in December, he says he is reluctant to take the lead.

PN: In a recent interview, Stoneback had several comments to make about the farm movement.

PN: Are there plans to open a strike office in Lawrence?

S: Not really. I've thought about it, but I'm just getting too old. I think some younger person should take the lead. I didn't really want to call (the meeting) I was just waiting for someone else too, but it seems like nobody else wants to take the leadership.

PN: What seems to be the problem?

S: It's unorganized. There are no officers. I've worked with the NFO for 20 years. The NFO is a much more organized, while this is just a movement. There's no system. I suggested that we need to start a Minuteman system to organize. A chairman would call officers who would in turn call five people, who would call more people, to get the word out for things like this tractorcade. Me and my wife, we didn't even know that was going to take place. Just one guy organized that.

PN: Why are some farmers not behind the movement?

S: There's an apathy there that you just can't get the job done. I know it's there in my mind. I been through too many strikes and I know what farmers do. You get the price up a little higher by withholding from the market, and they go and sell. They scab on you.

The NFO had a series of strikes in the '60s. We withheld hogs and cattle from the market and had a milk holding action, which I think was somewhat effective. At least we got the government support price raised.

PN: What does the Farm Bureau do in Kansas?

S: It's an organization of gentlemen farmers organized by the Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce to keep the farmers quiet. They're what you call... Company Unions.

PN: What about the NFO?

S: What good members do is authorize the NFO to sell for them. It's the same as a holding action if farmers would let the NFO sell for them. It's a quiet way of doing it.

PN: Do you think Douglas Co. farmers will support the strike once the AA starts organizing here?

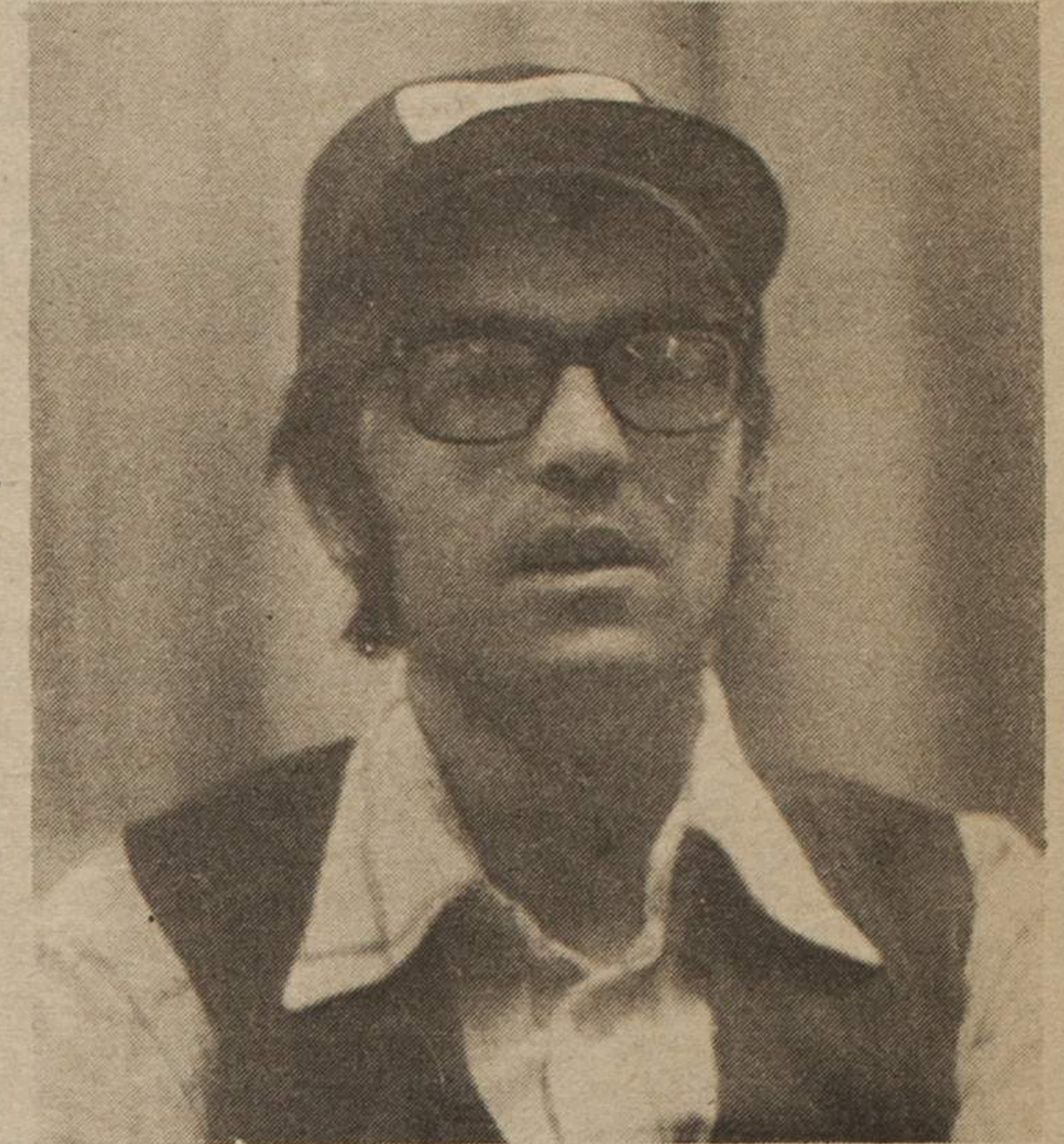
S: I hope so. I would go along with it if there was around 50 who wouldn't plant too.

Here's the way I feel about it, I planted wheat last fall and I harvested and I got it in my grain bins and I got a government loan on it. If I had sold it I would have got less than the cost of production. So why produce another crop, even at cost of production? If I don't plant then maybe I will get enough for last year's crop, parity price, and it would make up for the crop I didn't plant.



I had \$30,000 income this last year. But I had \$60,000 expenses...I'm hurt as bad as anybody because cattle have been low and wheat is low and those are my two main crops.

Time is Running Out on Us



PUBLIC NOTICE interviewed several persons who organized the American Agriculture movement when they were in Topeka for the massive protest and rally.

The following interview is with Marti Floyd, the organizer of the first Kansas strike office in Johnson. He's been working full time on the movement, flying all over Kansas talking to other farmers about their problems.

PN: How has farming been for you?

F: My income was \$8,000 last year and I'm paying on \$200,000 worth of equipment. I pay more interest in a year than most people make. And, I work from daylight to dark. When I planted my corn crop this year, I knew I was going to lose money on it. Your ambition to work just isn't there when you can't even make enough to pay your interest on loans.

PN: What do you think the basic problem is?

F: Manipulation by the government. For example, imports. They're importing so much from other countries and keeping supplies high, so prices are low.

If they don't do something, foreign investors are going to come in, also big conglomerates, to buy up land, and when that happens there's no longer going to be efficiency food production, because they'll work from 8 to 5; not like us who will work from dawn til dark. And then prices will get high. They'll demand it.



A lot of Arab countries are financing farmers that are in bad trouble. Big farmers. By doing that, it's the easiest way for them to get control of the land. If prices continue the way they are, those farmers are going to go broke and then the Arabs will own the land, real suddenly and you won't realize it.

PN: What do farmers want?

F: We're just trying to preserve the family farm. We just want a decent living. We're not out to get the consumer. If we get parity, we'll only raise the cost of food 2 to 3 per cent. That's a small cost to the consumer that can make the difference in whether we survive. One out of ten of us won't be here next year. And the year after that it will be worse. In three years only 50 per cent of us will still be far farming.

One of the things we want is farmers at the top, running the farm program instead of people who know nothing about it.

She's a Tractor Drivin' Woman

Johnette Martin drove an unheated 1968 930 Case tractor 300 miles from Norton to Topeka. It took her three days. She drove from sunrise to sunset, stopping in small towns for farm meetings in the evening.

The first night, 600 farmers turned out for the first AA meeting in the Belleville area. She slept on the floor of a hotel room that night with the wives of other farmers who were heading for Topeka. The other drivers in the tractorcade of 60 slept in national guard armories set up along the way. Being the only woman, she decided to make other arrangements.

Ms. Martin is 27, has been married for 10 years and has three boys. She made the journey without her husband and children, because as she put it, "Farming has been so good lately that my husband is working in town."

He couldn't get off his job so Ms. Martin decided that if their farm was going to show their support for the strike, she would have to drive the tractor.

PN: Do you do a lot of the farm work?

M: Yes. I figure marriage is half and half and I'll do my half. I take care of all the chores and drive the tractor until he comes home from work in town and then he drives the tractor.

PN: Does he help with the house work?

M: You bet. When we get done harvesting, for example, I'll take a shower and he'll fix supper. I'll do the dishes and he'll put the kids to bed. We work together on everything no matter what it is or where it's



at. We do it together.

PN: What is the situation on your farm?

M: Since we bought our place four years ago, we've yet to make a payment on it. We've had to refinance. His job in town buys our groceries, clothes and pays our utilities. The livestock and crops we raise are suppose to support the farm. But we've put a pencil to it and at the cost of our repairs, we paid over \$7,000 in repairs last year, and our fertilizer and our seeds, if we would just hold the wheat we have now and keep what we harvest next year and then not go to the fields at all in '78, we will save thousands of dollars.

PN: Do you think there's enough support from farmers to make changes?

M: You didn't see half the support for this thing here today that there really is. When we go back home, the welcome we're going to get there...It's just like when we send our boys off to battle. When they come back, everybody says, "Boy you did it for us." And, they feel that we did it for them and they're going to back us.

At our meetings they tell us what is going on, you know, back in Washington. It's about like Watergate. Once you dig something up, you just never quit getting to the dirt of it.