

Sing Along With Butz

Washington

The Agriculture Department is drawing mixed reviews on a plan to send a song-and-prayer tent show across the land to convince Americans that food prices aren't all that bad.

The proposal was submitted to Agriculture Secretary Earl L. Butz by an aide who urged that the show be put on the road quickly to counter what he called "the dis-

torted view" consumers are getting.

A memo outlining the proposed public relations tour suggests using a large circus-type tent and an "audio-visual" program ranging from the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving (with a hymn for musical accompaniment to a report on this fall's harvest (to the tune of "America the Beautiful").

Senator George McGovern

(Dem-S.D.) said yesterday he thought the tent show idea "almost incomprehensible" and that more effort should be spent on helping farmers and reducing middleman food profits.

"Instead of 'Dr. Butz' Traveling Medicine Show' rolling through the countryside peddling verbal massage oil to the public, farmers and ranchers would

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like some kind of explanation as to why the department sits on its hands while they have to sell their calves for less than half the cost of production," McGovern said.

Representative Spark M. Matsunaga (Dem-Hawaii) said the department "has lost touch with reality. They'll be a laughing stock."

A draft of the tent show plan, obtained by the Associated Press, showed its objectives included:

- "Communicate to citizens in major metro markets the facts about today's food situation, why food is a bigger bargain here than anywhere in the world.

- "To give citizens an opportunity to ask questions and voice complaints, thus giving useful feedback to USDA.

- "To instill in the public a greater confidence in the department, to strengthen the department's credibility."

The plan was devised by Steven Laine, a consultant to Butz and recently designated as the department's chief of public relations. His memo said the project should be launched within 30 days because "timing is essential to establish a better image for the department."

Laine's memo said an "audio-visual" display would tell about the country's food and farm history from the first Thanksgiving of the Pilgrims to this fall's harvest.

"For maximum emotional impact, all audio will be musical rather than verbal,

ranging from a hymn of thanksgiving as the Pilgrims bow heads over their first harvest to "America the Beautiful" as the best of this year's crop stands for harvest," the memo said.

The program would conclude with "a prayer by two local clergy and singing of America the Beautiful." The meeting will be held in a large circus-type tent set up in theater style, the memo said.

Representative Benjamin S. Rosenthal, (Dem-N.Y.) said it was an "outrageous idea" and that the department had used the line about Americans paying less for food than people in other countries for many years.

Representative W. R. Poage (Dem-Tex.), chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, commented, "Well, it's not the kind of thing that would occur to me. I don't want to condemn it. Neither do I want to endorse it without knowing more."

Jim Hightower, director of the Agribusiness Accountability Project and a frequent critic of the department's policies, said the plan was "the most ridiculous idea since Earl Butz was nominated" for the cabinet.

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