

Transcript of BY THE PEOPLE: Economy

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(Jim Albers, Farmer, Minden, NE) I think of the trade every day as a farmer, whether I—you know, the—what parts gonna—what country's gonna be wanting to buy or what's—who's selling this and that and you have to project almost like a year in advance what you're gonna—what you're gonna raise compared to what South America does and things like that. It's—it's not like it used to be.

(Jacque Harms, Moderator, KNOP-TV) What do you think should happen with subsidies?

(Albers) Oh without the subsidies, it has to go back to regulations because the price two years ago was a dollar ninety-six and even at 200 bushel an acre and raising this big crop, it's below cost of production. And without the subsidies, we'd—they'd be out of work. Even though we're doing—feeding the world. Without the subsidies, you're just cutting your own throat.

(Randy Stueven, Farmer, Grand Island, NE) The one thing positive about subsidies is it keeps Americans in cheap food.

(Trudy Greene, retired farmer, Gothenburg, NE) Well, every time they have taken subsidies off and like you said, the price has gone up. Then the American public—uh Public just screams and hollers and says, oh we can't pay that. We can't pay that. And many times it has been boycotted.

(Karen Rathke, United Way director, Cairo, NE) But subsidizing idle ground is a hard sell when there are Third World countries starving to death. So I think the farmer would rather farm the ground and be proud of the crop he produces if he had someplace to send it. Even if the government was still paying for it, they would like to—I mean of course your profit margin is a little different when you're not producing a crop and you are, but you know, have we explored all those venues.

(Albers) You know, we're the most efficient with what we got to go on, but you gotta do mission work in Haiti and Mexico and people starving all over down there. And walk several miles even for a glass of water. It don't make much sense.

(Greene) I've been very interested in NAFTA and the result of it. It doesn't seem like it's panning out as well as some wanted and I can remember the wrangle they had trying to get it passed and so forth and all the high hopes.

(Rathke) About three years ago, I was doing some training for social workers who were working with families on how to rebuild their lives. People on poverty and to get em out of poverty and to sustain themselves and it was so interesting to shift from our area and what the issues are in getting jobs and securing benefits and doing all of that with an unemployment rate of about two per cent versus down in Los Cruces, New Mexico, the unemployment was anywhere between, you know, 25 at the lowest and close to 50 at the highest because of NAFTA. And so they took us on a tour of all of the companies, you know, Levi Corporation. I guess I shouldn't have probably said Levi, but I did. And I don't buy Levis either anymore, but I shouldn't say that either, but (LAUGH).

I mean it was amazing because Levi was such uh the company down there and they—they moved their operations, you know, 30 miles south of the border and it's empty, and the housing around there that the people, you know, the workers were there are—it's just dilapidated and so, you know, and that was just one of the companies. There were so many of em and Hastings just had a Dayna Corporation. I don't know if anybody's familiar with Dayna, but they just lost their manufacturing, lots of jobs, good benefits, down to Mexico where it's all about cheap labor.

(Stueven) The Mexican economic policy seems to be based on the American's back pocket. They don't seem to be doing anything themselves to bring up their standards, to start taxing people the way they ought to, to start establishing the laws, and use the laws. If they would bring their government more like our government, so that the standards would be there, the costs would be there, and things would even out.

(Marc Alfano, pastor, Holdredge, NE) One of the other problems is once you get into an international arena, there isn't the same kind of regulation, not that regulation is bad. Sometimes it's good because it protects people. In agriculture, if they use poisons or fertilizers that are not used in this country, but yet they use it in that country and then that food gets imported into our country. It comes into our food chain, so there has to be some kind of international or global regulations.

(Jacque Harms, KNOP-TV) What role does the World Trade Organization have in all this?

(Rathke) You know, what—what do they have and what should they have and is there a gap between those—those two semantics? You look at the video when it talked about the farmer and raising, you know, cotton. He does—he has a better product, does a more efficient job of doing it, but he can't market and sell his product because we heavily subsidize the cotton growers in the United States. Well, we should take care of the people in the United States. That's our role, but somehow, you know, there's gotta be enough demand for cotton nationwide that we could somehow assist them in leveling that playing field a little bit.

(Alfano) It all comes down to why we're here. By The People. We have to define the role of government. Is government here for the people? Or is government here to be a framework or a vehicle for big business to operate and function. And is big business what's going to set the tone and the policy of the values of our country? Or are the people and families and communities going to do that?

(Greene) And of course now that the mad cow disease had hit the United States, that's another concern for those of us that are living in a farm community.

(Kurt Metzger, Drilling Contractor, Lexington, NE) As far as Japan is concerned, if they want to boycott our beef like we boycott their vehicles, I mean I think it's a give and take kind of thing. You want to scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

(Jill Jorgenson, Painting Contractor, Gothenburg, NE) But didn't we just do the same thing to Canada? I mean didn't we boycott their beef? So why is it okay for us to?

(Off Camera voice) All but one. (LAUGHTER)

(Jorgenson) Why is okay for us to have our own set of rules, but and expect another country to follow a different set of rules? It's prudent for all these comp—countries to make sure that our beef is safe and I think if we provide the adequate assurance and the tracking systems, I'm impressed with their ability to go back and— and know exactly where that calf was born and raised and where it's been and where it's parts are and vice versa.

(Stueven) I think when it comes to regulating, there's no better one to do it than the country that's purchasing it. You put your standards out there, what you want to buy, anyone that wants to grow things to those standards and the price that you're willing to pay, you've got a deal. I think in agriculture, I think it's pretty easy to deal with that. You just produce a product that they want. We've been doing that in America a lot.

(Alfano)

Now what happens when the company that's overseeing that decides it's more cost effective to send the farm over there than try to ship it overseas. And so they send another plant overseas and there go all the jobs. What's gonna happen is that the more there's international and global trade, it's just gonna be a matter of economics. It's gonna be more cost-effective to send your plants and people in that region where it's esoteric. It's in that particular market.