INTERVIEWEE: HORACE D. GODFREY

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

October 31, 1968

B: All right, Mr. Godfrey, the machine is running now. This is the interview with Horace Godfrey, the Administrator of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

Mr. Godfrey, if we may begin pretty far back in the past, you entered the Department of Agriculture in about the mid-thirties. Is that correct?

G: That's right. I came with the Department in 1934, in the state of North Carolina.

B: You were with the AAA?

G: I was with the original AAA.

B: During that time, back in the thirties and on into the forties, did you have any contact with then Congressman Johnson?

G: No, not any direct contact with him as Congressman Johnson, no.

B: Did you have any sort of relationship with him at all in those days?

G: No, none at all.

B: Do you recall when you first met Mr. Johnson?

G: Not a specific date, but it was during the time that he was in the Senate.

B: In what connection, sir?

G: This was in connection with some agricultural legislation that was being considered by the Congress.

B: You were presenting it to Congress?

G: No, actually I was still in North Carolina with farm program work, and my congressman was Harold D. Cooley who was Chairman of the House

Agricultural Committee and we were working, as I recall, on some cotton legislation. This cotton legislation was important of course to the whole cotton belt, and President Johnson at that time was senator from Texas, and of course it was important legislation to Texas. And if I recall correctly there were a group of cotton producers from the principal cotton growing states in here discussing the proposed legislation. Congressman Cooley asked me, because of my long experience in administering cotton programs, to come in and consult with him, and with Congressman [W.R.] Poage, who is now Chairman of the House Ag Committee. As I recall we had some joint sessions with members of the House and certain members of the Senate on the proposed legislation. Senator Johnson was there, and may have been the Senate majority leader at the time. If I am not mistaken, this is '53 or '54.

B: Probably would have been. These series of meetings were the preliminary meetings to arrange the tactics for the legislation in Congress?

G: These were sessions where you would discuss the legislative proposals that had not been finalized at that time. In fact, hearings had not been held at that time. So they were discussing in a preliminary way what kind of cotton legislation was needed. Then later in subsequent meetings we discussed the details of the legislation in some sessions.

B: Do you recall any specific contribution or comments that Mr. Johnson made on that occasion or any similar one?

G: I remember very definitely that there was some controversy as to establishment of a fair and equitable base period of years for determining state cotton allotments, and President Johnson was very

insistent that this be fair to all areas of the country.

B: This was while he was--

G: This was while he was a Senator, yes. He was very insistent that we not necessarily deviate from what had been used in the past, historically, in order to benefit one area, but that we use a formula to determine the base years which would subsequently determine the state allotment that was fair and equitable to all areas. And we wound up with some areas wanting a three-year base period. In prior years, we had been using a five-year base period, and we wound up in the legislation with a five-year base period.

B: When Mr. Johnson gets in a conference like that, does he pretty well dominate it?

G: No, not at that time. He listened and found out what the problem was first and then he offered his ideas.

B: Did he advise you specifically on legislative tactics along the line of you've got to have such and such in the bill to get it by such and such congressmen?

G: Yes, this was discussed in every one of these sessions because you had delegations from the cotton states who were important to cotton legislation and key members of the House committee and the Senate committee on agriculture. Then of course he knew what it would take to get the support of the non-cotton sector, also. And you had to have something that was passable, not only workable.

B: Do you recall any other examples of Senator Johnson in action in those days before '60?

G: These were the only contacts I had with him directly in the fifties.

B: May I ask here, sir, this is the kind of thing that ought to be on this

record. Have you ever been politically active, that is, in partisan politics?

G: No, not outwardly because I have been in federal service since 1934. But I have been politically active as an individual, but as a civil servant I am restricted in some areas.

B: How does a civil servant make that distinction? Could you give an example of individual activity in that sense?

G: Well, in individual activity, you let your wishes be known to your neighbors, your associates, actually your supporters, because you do have people supporting you in a job like I have now. I had to have some political support in order for me to get this job. So you let your desires be known there. In working with farm people, for example, in North Carolina for twenty-five years, I became acquainted with a large number of farmers in the state and in our organization we have the farmer-elected committee that runs farm programs. And the farmer-elected committee generally are leaders within their community. In North Carolina, I knew all of these people that were elected to these communities and worked with them twenty-five years, so I expect they depended on me quite a bit for direction in the political area. I counseled with them about it. I was not restricted in expressing my opinions there.

B: Do you consider yourself a Democrat?

G: Very definitely.

B: You were appointed to the ASCS in '61. Is that correct?

G: Yes, I hold two titles really. One is a secretarial appointment as administrator of ASCS; and then as executive vice president to the Commodity Credit Corporation. This is a presidential appointment,

confirmed by the Senate. I am a member of the board the Commodity Credit Corporation also. So I was appointed by Secretary Freeman and by President Kennedy, and took office the same day that Secretary Freeman took office. So I've been here ever since.

B: Sir, is it usual for a career man, such as yourself, to be named to the administratorship of the ASCS?

G: I am the first career man that has ever been named.

B: That was in the Kennedy administration. Was there then a deliberate policy of encouraging the civil service by putting career men in the appointee positions?

G: There has been some encouragement in this area, more so since President Johnson had been President, though, than there was prior to that time. My appointment was not necessarily because of my career, but it was pushed by quite a number of people from the South who wanted someone in the Department of Agriculture who was familiar with the commodities grown in the South. They wanted someone from the South in a position of authority in the Department of Agriculture which had not been true during the previous eight years. I was personally brought to their attention by, I guess by the fact that Congressman Cooley had asked me up here during the fifties and I had counseled with people all over the country particularly in the South on cotton, tobacco, peanuts, rice legislation, and actually had appeared many times before the committees and testified on legislation that was being proposed.

B: Is it possible that Governor Hodges was influential in your appointment?

G: Governor Hodges did recommend me. Governor Sanford who was the incoming governor was strong in my support as was Congressman Colley and the Senators from North Carolina, and I believe the entire

congressional delegation from North Carolina as well as the Senators from Georgia, and some other areas of the South.

B: Does one campaign for that kind of appointment, or make oneself available?

G: No. I wouldn't say you campaign for it. You get a lot of phone calls asking if you would be interested. I received a tremendous number of phone calls wanting to know if I would be interested, and I said, "Well, I would consider it." And actually Secretary Freeman, after he was named by President Kennedy as secretary, wrote me and asked if I was interested in a job in the department and if I was, he wanted me to come in for an interview, which I did.

B: Now, were you then reappointed by Mr. Johnson after he acceded to the Presidency?

G: No, it did not require reappointment. What all appointed officials did I guess was to tender their resignation. This is what I did. I tendered my resignation from both positions, and it was never accepted. So I just continued to serve.

B: Now, sir, during the years of Mr. Johnson's presidency, since late '63, have you had any contact with the President directly or indirectly in the way of learning from him what areas he wants emphasized, what projects he wants pushed?

G: Well, a lot of indirect contacts because the secretary and in his absence the undersecretary always attend cabinet meetings, and the secretary is constantly in touch with President Johnson. We have something very unusual here in the department insofar as big departments of government are concerned. We have a staff meeting every morning, and this is attended by the top officials close to the secretary.

B: This is a Secretary's staff meeting?

G: Yes, the secretary's staff meeting, and it consisted of the assistant secretaries, the undersecretary, and the secretary's personal staff, and the top administrators in the department, not all administrators, but the top, key ones. And in this staff meeting every morning the secretary conveys to us any direction that he has had from the President, any requests he has had from the President. Then we also discuss proposals that should be made to the President.

B: Is this kind of thing invariably conducted through the secretary, or would you as the administrator of a major division, or bureau even have occasion to deal directly with the President or his staff?

G: I deal directly with his staff, yes. He has had someone on his staff all the time who deals with the Department of Agriculture.

B: Who has that generally been?

G: Well, just recently it has been DeVier Pierson, and prior to that for some time it was Myer Feldman who continued over from President Kennedy. Then [Harry C.] McPherson in an intervening period, then [Bill] Moyers dealt with some things that we work on. So did Henry Hall Wilson who was working in the congressional liaison area. So we did deal with several members of the staff from time to time. I have had occasion to talk to, I guess, practically all the key men close to the President from time to time about a particular problem.

B: How do you find them to get along with?

G: Had no difficulty whatsoever. Some of them have a better knowledge of agriculture than others, but I've had no problem getting along with anybody on the presidential staff.

B: In this kind of communication, is it always fairly clear to you

precisely what the President wants done?

G: I assume that whatever they are saying, this is what he wants done. And so we make every effort we can to prepare the necessary staff work to accomplish this.

B: Does your job include advice on legislative drafting?

G: Yes, in the agricultural field, very definitely.

B: What has been in your tenure here the major legislative projects that you have had?

G: Well, we had the first piece of major legislation passed during the Kennedy administration. It was an emergency feed grain program, the 1961 Feed Grain Act. In fact, it was passed in late March, 1961. Everyone said it couldn't be done in that brief a period of time. Even if it was accomplished, they said that it would be impossible to put it into operation for 1961. But we got it passed and we did put it in operation and it was a tremendous success. It was a one-year bill. Then we went later that year on an all-encompassing legislative proposal which was not received with favor by the Congress. We had to go back then for a renewal of the feed grain program and a similar program for wheat. This was in the fall of '61. We got this renewed for '62 and '63, as I recall. Then after that we had a '64 one-price cotton bill, and a '64 voluntary wheat program which was following a defeat of a marketing quota program for wheat. And this required considerable drafting, redrafting, hearings before the committee, private sessions before the committees, and so forth. This as I recall was passed in the early spring of '64, or late spring '64. Then the big legislative act that we have had was the Food and Agricultural Act of 1965 which was a four-year program, covering feed grains, wheat, cotton, land retirement and other minor legislative matters.

It fell my personal responsibility for the department to kind of steer this through the House and Senate and then through the conference.

B: Sir, if we may take that one as an example, would you describe how you go about doing that? That is, what kind of arguments or political pressures you martial, exactly how you get a major piece of legislation under way successfully.

G: Well, we had learned a lot from previous experience by then. We found that a piece of legislation had to be passable and workable.

B: That is, in the drafting process?

G: Yes, you've got to consider who's important to getting it passed on your committees, first. Then you've got to consider what objections are going to be raised by other committee members, and you've got to try to draft a bill that you feel the majority will go along with. We do furnish a drafting service for the committee if they ask for it.

B: Could you give a specific example of meeting this kind of need in advance in the drafting process?

G: Yes, on this particular bill, we started with a bill in the House, working with the House Ag Committee primarily Congressman Cooley and Congressman Poage. They were the leadership on the majority side, and some of their key advisers, Congressman Graham Purcell in the grain area, Congressman Paul Jones and Congressman Tom Abernathy in the cotton area. They were the key men that would be on the majority side on this. And so you worked with them. Now, in order to get them in the frame of mind and an understanding of all its many, many things that they have to keep up with, you use some people from out in the producing area, out in the field. You get them well

informed by discussing the problems with them. You eventually come up with the question: "Well, what can we do?" that will, in the way of a piece of legislation that would satisfy our California area, our Texas area, and our Delta area, and our Southeastern area insofar as cotton is concerned.

B: Sir, may I ask here, your reference to people in the field, do you mean your Department of Agriculture representatives, or do you mean farmers?

G: These are farmers and people who are interested in cotton.

B: Would these normally be members of your ASCS group?

G: No. There are some large growers, some large oil mill producers of cottonseed oil, and some large co-op representative warehousemen and ginners in California. Now, in the same vein, you have the same setup --large producers, processers, ginners, and etc., in Texas. Texas being so large you may actually [have] at least three distinct areas of production, and they don't always have the same ideas. Then you come to the Delta which generally is the second-largest cotton producing area and California is third, and then the Southeast. And the Southeastern problems in cotton are entirely different from the California problems. So what you are trying to do is draft legislation, get these people to agree on a piece of legislation even though it doesn't give any one of them exactly everything that they want. You get them to agree that we've got to have legislation, and in getting legislation, here are the principal rules we want, and here is what we want to accomplish, and then you try to draft legislation that they can agree to.

B: Do you then encourage these men, the producers in the areas, to let

their congressman know that they have--

G: Yes, very definitely. In fact, we take them to some discussion sessions on the Hill before the bill is introduced, a lot of times.

B: Where do you get over the hill in this kind of thing? Is it in this drafting process, or in the committee?

G: It's in the committees when you get over the hill because you can never cover everything in the drafting process that is going to be brought up in the committee. There are going to be objections from somebody, and these objections may be strong enough to where you have to make some changes in the drafting. In the '65 act, I guess we had as many as twenty-five or thirty different drafts.

B: That many?

G: Yes. You would have that many because it went over a period of six to eight months before we ever got it passed.

B: Do you bring the bigger guns to bear too? Do you let the committee members know, say, that the President is interested in this?

G: Oh yes, oh yes.

B: Was that the case in this--?

G: In this case, the '65 act I recall very vividly that the President assigned the Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, to meet with the cotton people and tell them what could be done and what couldn't be done. And this meeting was held with a group of leaders from throughout the cotton belt.

B: The producers, again?

G: Producers, processors, textile people, too, I'm considering them in also. So this meeting was held in the executive offices, and Vice President Humphrey said, "This is what the President

wants done and this is how far we can go in expenditures on this," and so forth. He covered the whole field.

B: And then those men carried that word to their congressmen?

G: They carried that word. They first came back, a lot of them didn't particularly like what they had heard because they couldn't get everything that they wanted. So they then came back and we drafted legislation. We didn't get everything that we wanted, but we got a pretty good piece of legislation. Cotton was a key to getting legislation passed. Here we had had a feed-grain, and wheat program for some years, from '61 in the case of feed-grains, and from '64 in the case of wheat, and these were working satisfactorily. We needed a new cotton program, and a wool program was included in the '65 act also. It was similar to what we had had in the past. So cotton was a key to getting a piece of legislation and getting a long-term bill which was a four-year bill. So we worked through the House Ag Committee long hours, night and day just about. So we kept on persisting, and we finally got a piece of legislation through the House Committee and through the House. But in the meantime a Senate committee got a different piece of legislation passed which was entirely opposite from what we wanted for a cotton program.

B: How does that happen, sir? Were not you also working with the Senators?

G: Yes, yes. But the Senate is a different body from the House, of course, and there are not as many of them, and they have definite ideas. In this case the leader, the chairman of the Senate Ag Committee was a very strong individual, a very knowledgeable individual, Senator [Allen] Ellender, very knowledgeable, and his committee follows his leadership, he's a strong leader. And he had some strong

cotton people on there, such as Senator [James O.] Eastland and Senator [Herman E.] Talmadge from Georgia, and Senator [B. Everett] Jordan from North Carolina. So they had passed a different type of cotton bill. We then began working with one member of the Senate committee, Senator Talmadge, and he brought in Senator Donald Russell of South CArolina to work with him, and Senator Jordan in an effort to offer a substitute on the floor of the Senate for what they had voted out of the committee. If I am not mistaken, I think I'm pretty sure of this for the first time in the history of the Senate, a committee chairman was beaten on the floor of the Senate by a two-to-one vote.

B: What kind of political guns do you have to bring to bear to get that kind of thing?

G: Well, you have to have a strong leader first. Senator Talmadge agreed to carry the program. We did our homework, as we call it, by contacting the various Senators also.

B: You again not only contact them directly yourself, but get--

G: Get other people, yes. Then, of course, Senator Talmadge has a pretty good following in the Senate, as does Senator Jordan from North Carolina, Senator Russell from South Carolina, and with Senator Talmadge pushing, you had Senator Russell from Georgia also pushing, Senator Eastland and Senator Stennis generally stuck with the chairman of the committee, as I remember, but we were able to prevail. We got bi-partisan support. We were able to prevail on the floor of the Senate.

B: Did Mr. Johnson or Mr. Humphrey get engaged in this stage of the--

G: I imagine they did. I'm sure that Vice President Humphrey was on the floor working when the debate was going on.

B: Did you pass the word to the White House staff that you--

G: Oh, yes, we were constantly in touch with the White House staff as to our plans and what we were going to do, and we worked with the White House staff. They were working with different Senators.

B: Does this include keeping a running count, say, on the lines of Senator A is with us, Senator B is leaning, Senator C needs a little more work?

G: Oh, yes, and the report was filed each morning with the staff at the White House as to where we stood and where we thought we stood, how we were progressing. And they would help in scheduling too. Personally I did--

B: "Help in scheduling--" I'm not sure I understand.

G: Working with the leadership in the Senate as to when the bill would be brought up on the floor say.

B: The legislative tactics involved.

G: Yeah, the legislative tactics. It was my personal responsibility to see that Senator Talmadge understood every word in the bill of the proposed legislation.

B: So he could answer questions?

G: And he did his homework from early morning until late at night, and he was able to answer the questions when they were brought up on the floor. I worked with his staff and of course I was in the gallery and if they had any questions I got the answers quickly.

B: It must be awfully time consuming for you. This whole process, you said, was six or eight months.

G: We spent almost eight months on the Hill that year.

B: Did it give you a chance to do anything else during that period?

G: Well, you did your own work, office work, at night.

B: How much of your staff, your own staff, would be involved in this kind of process?

G: Whatever was required. I had to have, of course, my economic staff working and this involved about two men, and then I had what I call a cotton policy staff, a man who knows cotton from one end to the other and all about it.

B: Who is that, sir?

G: That is a Mr. Moss. He's director of my cotton policy staff and was formerly in the office of the General Counsel as a lawyer, but came into the cotton area before I came to Washington.

B: He's knowledgeable in the law and in the cotton field?

G: Yes.

B: That's an unusual combination.

G: It's very good, a very good combination, particularly when you are dealing in the legislative area. And when I came in, I put him on my staff because I had known him over the years and knew his qualifications. It was real interesting that year in getting the bill through. After we got it through the Senate, it was slightly different from the House version because Senator Talmadge wasn't willing to accept everything that was in the House bill. The House bill as passed he felt didn't accomplish all of the objectives that we wanted to accomplish, and we felt this way too. We felt there needed to be some changes, but we had to give in in the fight in the House in order to get the bill. So we went ahead and got it through the Senate and then the conference lasted an unusually long time.

Normally the conferees can get together on their differences in two meetings you've got them ironed out. One gives here and the other gives there. This one took three weeks.

B: Incidentally, at that stage, do you try to exercise any influence over the appointments of the conferees, or can you?

G: Generally, we don't. The leadership generally appoints it. Now, sometimes we indicate our preferences, yes, our preferences as to who should be. But the leadership, when you have leadership like Ellender in the Senate, and Mike Mansfield, they are going to decide who will be the conferees.

B: Is it generally easier to get an agreement in the small group of the conferees?

G: Not always. As I said, it took three weeks here, and there weren't many differences.

B: Is that three weeks of steady work?

G: This is three weeks of almost steady work, yes. You go over at ten in the morning and usually break at 12:30, and if the Senate would give permission to meet, you can go back at two and stay till five.

B: And at this stage, you are still in continual contact with the White House staff?

G: Yes, very definitely you are in contact with the White House staff. It may be one man holding out too strong that they may influence a little bit or something that we would never be able to get agreement on. Generally you are not in the conference. Generally, the Senators and the Congressmen do not ask you in the conference, but their staffs are continually working with you back and forth, and as counsels to the staffs. But in this case I guess I spent about half the time

that the conference was in session inside the room with them.

B: Is that on an informal basis, or are you precisely a witness?

G: It's an informal basis to be there to answer any questions that they might raise or give any guidance that you might give as to how will this work and occasionally, "Well, what do you suggest?" I remember one sticky point on a small farm program provision that we couldn't get agreement for two days. Finally they asked me, "Well, what do you propose?" And I had discussed privately with both the Senate leadership and the House leadership what I could propose, which I thought was kind of a middle-of-the-road deal, and they both agreed that if it was proposed, that they would agree to it. But neither was willing to propose it himself. So finally somebody said, "Well, what do you propose?" And I proposed it, and it was finally agreed on. That was the time we settled the conference.

B: When that kind of long difficulty is over, did you get any word from Mr. Johnson or from the White House of congratulations, or praise?

G: Yes, you may note on the wall there President Johnson giving me the pen with which the legislation was signed. It's quite rewarding to have him acknowledge that you had a part in it.

B: Were there any other major legislative acts during this period?

G: Well, certainly, there were other major ones, and I was involved in from time to time. The Food for Freedom Act, for example, which had been renewed several times during President Johnson's Administration. The Food Stamp Act, I was involved in this. We had a particular piece of legislation applying only to tobacco in 1964, I believe it was, when we got through something new as far as agriculture was

concerned, a quantitative control for flue-cured tobacco. We personally pushed this through the House and the Senate, and the President's message that year advocated this. We had been working on it for some time. Actually it had been discussed for ten years.

B: How did it get in the President's message?

G: We recommended that it be put into the President's message. We had gotten other legislation dealing with our work, not major, but minor legislation every time. In fact, it would be impossible to list all the pieces of legislation that affected our work, but I would guess that during the last eight years it has been over 300 pieces of legislation affecting our work.

B: Have you found Congress generally in these years pretty easy to work with?

G: No, not easy to work with, because agriculture is not a popular thing to work with. You don't have people pushing to get on the ag committees, either in the House of the Senate, and agriculture is not a program that involves a majority of the people. It involves only 6 percent of our people.

B: So the men you are working with generally are those men from agricultural areas only, I guess.

G: That's right.

B: Sir, beyond legislation of the new and continuing programs, what has been the major emphasis in your area in the Johnson administration?

G: The major emphasis has been an effort to improve farm income. And to do this through commodity programs and by bringing rural life more into all of our programs.

B: By rural life, do you mean things not specifically related to the tilling

of the soil?

G: That's right. Give equal opportunity to rural residents that urban residents have--schools, roads, homes, and so forth.

B: And the ASCS has gotten involved in things like the Appalachian program and the poverty programs?

G: Yes, very definitely. ASCS is involved vitally and we have a particular part of the Appalachian program.

B: I knew you did.

G: Section 203 is our part, and we had a part in passing this as we did the '65 act. We drafted it, we worked it on through, it met with considerable opposition from some areas of the country--they contended "All you are doing here is promoting an expansion of livestock." But we were able to convince them that it was a land stabilization program. Then in the poverty area many of our programs give special consideration to low-income groups--the cotton program, feed-grain program has special provisions written in them.

B: I was going to ask the question about that. In the past, the Department of Agriculture has received some criticism as being a program that largely benefits landowners and big landowners at that.

G: This is absolutely false. Absolutely false. The average payments under the Agriculture Conservation Program where we share the cost with the farmer for maintaining productivity and conserving the soil and natural resources, the average cost-share under that is under $200 per individual. The average commodity loan where a farmer places a commodity under government loan until the price rises above the loan rate and he redeems it, the average loan is between $500 and $1,000 as I recall. And of all the 3,200,000

payments made last year, there were only five over a million dollars.

B: The annual figure, you mean?

G: Yes. So the programs really benefit the small farmers. Of course, there are more of them than there are big ones.

B: Has there also been any work with the problem of farm labor, tenants, share-croppers, or are there any left?

G: Yes, there are a lot of them left, and particularly more so in the cotton, tobacco, peanut areas than in other areas of the country. You have some problems with this, we have had considerable complaints and numerous investigations, particularly when you get into the civil rights area--charges and countercharges resulting in investigations of mistreatment of tenants or share-croppers, of driving tenants and share-croppers off the farm in order for the landlord to collect all the payments or for other reasons. Every piece of legislation since 1938 has contained in it protection for tenants and share-croppers. This has been administered by ASCS, and I think administered good. We haven't found over one-tenth of one percent of cases where the charges had any validity to them whatsoever. There has been quite a bit of notoriety recently on one in Alabama where the papers construed it to mean a violation of our program provisions, but it was not. It was a violation of the minimum wage provisions. So the tenants, actually they weren't tenants, they weren't share-croppers, they were wage-hands, and he had not paid them adequate wages.

B: Has the emphasis in this area increased notably in the Johnson years on the race aspects?

G: Yes, it has, very definitely. And it has increased on the tenants

and share-croppers also. In fact, when you came in I was reading a memorandum that we just sent out on the tenant-sharecropper deal. Another one, a follow-up because there has been more emphasis in the civil rights areas as everyone knows in the last eight years. As a result of this it gets more attention and we've had to give it more attention. There have been some activists groups working in the area.

B: Has not this also involved the composition of your county committees?

G: The county committees are elected by the farmers within the county--we've had to intensify our educational campaign, and we've always tried to encourage as many people to vote in the election as we possibly could get to vote. That way, you get the best people serving on the committees. But because of the efforts by some of the civil rights groups, we have had more minorities elected to the local committees, the community committees, and this year we got the first committee chairman elected in Alabama.

B: You mean the first Negro elected committee chairman?

G: The first Negro committee chairman elected.

B: Has the President made pretty clear to you either directly or indirectly his attitude toward the race problem and the connection with your work?

G: Yes, the department you may recall was criticized very strongly in a report in 1964 on civil rights, by the civil rights commission. The President transmitted the report to the secretary and made it clear not only in his letter of transmittal, but in a cabinet meeting that he intended for any discrimination that was evident in the Department of Agriculture to be corrected. And the secretary made it clear to us

that the time of talking about it was over. It was time now to go to work and get something done about it. In fact, President Johnson appeared over here at a meeting, public meeting, before the department's Civil Rights Advisory Committee. I was in the meeting, and he didn't leave any doubt in my mind what he intended to do. And I believe this was before he became President, probably while he was Vice President, but it could have been while he was President.

B: Do you recall what he said, and how he said it?

G: Yes, he said that it was time that every American made up his mind that there was going to be equality of opportunity and that all programs were going to be administered in such a way that no one could say that discrimination was involved.

B: That might have been while he was Vice President and Chairman of the Civil Rights Commission.

G: Yes. But he also made similar statements at a meeting here after he became President. I recall this. But he did come as Vice President when he was chairman of the Civil Rights Commission.

B: Do you feel that the work of your area in the Department of Agriculture has been effective in carrying this out?

G: I'm quite proud of our record in the ASCS. When the Civil Rights Commission report was issued, we had seven temporary employees in the Southern states in the ASCS. That's all.

B: You mean seven Negroes as temporary employees?

G: Yes, that's all. We didn't have a single member of our state committee that are appointed by the secretary. Of course, these are cleared by the White House staff, too. We didn't have a single Negro member on our state committees in the Southern states, and now we do have. We

have a Negro serving on the state committee in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, have had one in Maryland--he resigned--had one in Mississippi also.

B: Sir, has this sort of put you in the middle--that is, this whole race problem. Has it put you between the drive of the administration on one hand and the people you have to deal with in the states on the other hand?

G: There's an interesting story back of this. Being a Southerner, I had some definite feelings about this, but quite different from a lot of Southerners. I was raised a little bit different I guess. A year, two years prior to the civil rights commission report, I had been working with our state committees in each state trying to give equal opportunity to all people and trying to get them to hire some Negroes in our county offices and in our state offices. I admit with very little success as was evidenced by seven temporary Negro employees and only two Negro employees at the state level in other than custodial jobs. So when the Civil Rights Commission report came out, it gave me the opportunity to do what I wanted to do with full backing.

B: It gave you some clout.

G: Yeah, exactly. So what I did was draft a memorandum that would in effect establish goals for employment of Negro people in the Southern states.

B: On some sort of quota percentage?

G: No, we weren't allowed to have quotas, but in effect this was a quota. It was goals. We called it goals to avoid the criticisms from the Civil Service Commission and others. I got the secretary's

approval on this, over the objection of many members of our staff.

B: What were the grounds for the objections?

G: They thought it was too strong. They thought we were going too far too fast, that it would bring more resentment than we would accomplish on it.

B: Was there some implication that this might be harmful to your legislative--?

G: Oh, yes, very much so, very much so. In fact, there were repercussions, but the secretary approved my draft of the letter. My draft of the letter said that we were going to have as a goal, a percentage of employment of the Negro race and the same precentage that they were of the total farmers in the county or state. Since we did not have a lot of vacancies occurring in our permanent staff, we weren't going to fire anyone, but we did employ a lot of temporary people every summer in land measurement and things like that. We would correct the imbalance on a percentage basis by hiring additional temporaries from the Negro race. And the first year we hired over 5,000 Negroes in temporary employment.

B: Did you approximately meet the goals?

G: We met the goals; we exceeded the goals. We now have 11 percent of our total employment, permanent employment in county offices from the Negro race in the Southern states.

B: Do you feel that it's accepted now?

G: It is accepted now. In fact, I have participated in writing a book that is at the publisher now, with some of my co-workers on the breaking down of race barriers in the South, and I think ASCS did it. I think we did it because we went in to little towns, county seats,

and we hired the first Negro that had ever been hired for a job in that town outside of custodial duties. And we worked with the Negro leadership and our people in the South were entirely cooperative. I carried this memo to the field myself.

B: I was going to ask if you went to the scene and--I suppose the burden would be on your field people.

G: I called all of my state committees into Atlanta, and I read the memorandum to them, distributed it to them, and then said, "I want questions. What do you have? If anybody feels that they can't do the job, then I would advise you to tender your resignation because if you can't do the job, we are going to do it one way or another."

B: Did they accept it? Did you have any resignations?

G: We didn't have a single resignation, and it has been accepted, and people that have said before that they would quit before they would ever sit beside a Negro are now sitting beside them at meetings. We've had a Negro state committeeman to preside at a state-wide conference of ASCS employees in Mississippi, which is quite an accomplishment.

B: Have you heard from the President on this program, incidentally?

G: Yes, more than indirectly. Actually, the secretary made a special award at our annual awards ceremony to me for the work that we have done in this area, and I know that this came directly from the President also. But we had repercussions. I was called over on the Hill for airing on my memorandum.

B: Was it before the Agriculture Committee of the House?

G: This was supposed to be before the House Ag Committee, but somehow or other word got out what it was going to be about, so all of the

liberals from the Northern and Eastern areas showed up, too. So they decided not to have a discussion of it, and they asked me to come by Chairman Cooley's office, and not only the Southern members of the Ag Committee, but the Southern members from all areas of the South, members of Congress including some who were on the Appropriations Committee and other committees. And I took a pretty good lashing for about two hours. Finally, after two hours I was able to tell them what we were going to do, what we were going to do regardless.

B: What did the lashing consist of?

G: That I had turned my back on my own people, that I was hiring unqualified people out there, and forcing our people to hire unqualified people, that we were displacing employees who had had these temporary jobs in the past in order to give them to Negores--oh, everything that you could think of. I assured them that sure, some people who had had temporary jobs in the past wouldn't have them this year, but we had furnished a lot of college students temporary employment in the summertime in the past and it was just as important that Negro people have an opportunity to go to college by earning money in the summertime as it was white people. And it was time that we got around to it.

B: Were there open or implied threats that your legislative program or the department's appropriation might be in trouble?

G: There were open threats that this would affect our legislation.

B: Was there any particular piece of legislation?

G: Well, they didn't name any particular piece of legislation, but they said it would make it more difficult to get legislation through. I replied that, "Well, you have to have the votes of the Northern

liberals, so I think it might help you get legislation through," which it did by the way.

B: I was going to ask if it did.

G: It did.

B: Overall, it had a beneficial effect on your legislative program?

G: Yes. I also took a thorough thrashing when I appeared for the appropriations hearings. This was never mentioned in the appropriation hearing, but it was in the background. And I had people saying that we would have a complete revolution in the South. We didn't have. I had people saying that we would not be able to keep the offices that we had in some places, which were rent-free in some locations. I had only one instance where county commissioners were furnishing us free space in the courthouse and they informed our county committee and the county manager one day that if they employed that Negro to come to work the next day that they would have to move the office.

B: Where was that?

G: That was in Alabama. I personally called the county manager, told him to get a moving van and move the furniture out on the streets that afternoon, and to keep that Negro girl working, and work on the street until he could find a building to house the office. Well, it was never moved. The county commissioner gave in.

B: Among the congressmen, sir, who has been the most insistent or vociferous in the kind of lashing you have described?

G: Well, I would rather not name any individuals. I would just say that this is generally throughout the South. There weren't many in the South that were liberal.

B: I was going to ask if there were any of the Southern senators or representative who even privately gave you support or endorsement?

G: Yes, there were some. There were some that privately gave me support. Some that in the meeting that day after I explained what my goals were, and what we had to do, why we had to do it, that it was right, said, "Well, I wish you the best of luck, and I'll be trying to help you all I can."

B: Who, for example, too that attitude?

G: Well, I never will forget L. H. Fountain from North Carolina was one that really told me that day in the meeting. He said, "I know that what you are doing is right, but it won't be popular in my district. It won't be popular to me. I won't openly subscribe to it. But it's right."

B: In that kind of circumstances, any kind word is appreciated.

G: Oh, yes, any kind words. There were some Senators, also, that knew that the time was coming that we had to do this, and there has been quite a change in attitude since it happened. I'm real proud of the progress we've made because I thought it was wrong before. It was custom, however, and we as people tend to abide by custom, you know. But we've got a real good record. Our people now, as far as I can see, have no fears about integration whatsoever. I never attend a meeting now in the South that you don't have Negro people in them with the white people.

B: Considering that it has really been a fairly brief period of time, it is a remarkable thing.

G: It is remarkable. You may recall a county in Mississippi where the three men were murdered.

B: Near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

G: I don't recall the name of the county.

B: Neshoba.

G: Neshoba. Well, I was quite pleased when our state man in Mississippi called me about a year ago and said, "I think you will be pleased to know that we put a permanent Negro employee in this county today, and we haven't had the first repercussion, and we won't have the first repercussion."

B: Incidentally, in this project, are you able to find enough qualified Negroes?

G: We had problems, real problems. And the side benefits from this have been greater than the benefits of employing Negroes. We went to the leadership, the Negro leadership, and said, "Now, we want qualified people." For example, we took school teachers, and preachers, and so forth, and doctors and lawyers and said, "Now, our goals are to give your people employment, and we know that you don't want to fall down by giving us unqualified people. So give us qualified people. We are putting the responsibility on you to find them." We had trouble finding qualified people. We found some that had finished high school, school, and went to college that really couldn't make the grade.

B: Do you have to make a civil service--

G: We don't have civil service in our counties. In the state offices we do. But we did have a qualifying examination at the county level. Most of them were able to pass the examination, but they couldn't keep their work standards high enough. The leadership then saw that they had to upgrade their curriculum in their schools. They had to upgrade their teaching standards. This

was the side benefits that came from all of this. They had to do something. They had to have better trained people. For example, we recruited nine college graduates from a Negro college in Alabama to come to Washington to work. Only two out of the nine stuck it out. The rest of them went back. They couldn't keep the pace.

We have a high percent of Negroes in our Washington office here that do meet the standards, but they are trained here in Washington. When we found that we were running short of trained people, we began training courses. After they finished school, we would take them on the payroll and train them for six months with the understanding that after we trained them, that they would take a job wherever we could find a job for them. We established this training program in every one of the principal Southern states with more than 10 percent of the population [being] Negroes.

B: Has it been an effective program? Is it still under way?

G: Real effective. It's real effective and still in operation.

B: Do you anticipate it will become a permanent thing?

G: Well, we look at it--

B: Or so long as it is necessary?

G: We run training programs all the time, and this was just a subsidiary part of our training program, but it's been real effective. The first one, by the way, started in Mississippi. And then we expanded to other areas, it was so successful there.

B: And no local repercussions?

G: None whatsoever. We haven't had the first incident, not the first one.

And in our offices, we've got Negro girls now in the South waiting on the farmers who come to the counter. If you had told me five years ago this could happen, I would have said, "It's impossible. It's impossible." But it's being done. There are offices in the South that had segregated facilities before. There were offices in the South that even had segregated counters. The whites came to one counter, and the Negroes to the other. We don't have any of that now. We don't have an office in a single building that has segregated facilities.

B: Incidentally, has this kind of minority problem existed in any other part of the country. That is, is it particularly a Southern Negro problem?

G: No, we've had some problems in some other parts with the Indians, around Indian reservations and some small problem with the Mexican-Americans.

B: Your approach has been the same?

G: The approach has been the same there.

B: Sir, in another area of question, there has been recently in the Johnson administration a great deal of emphasis at least publicly on urban problems. Do you or do the people in the Department of Agriculture generally ever get the impression that you are sort of being left behind or left out?

G: Well, there is quite a bit of competition for the federal dollar, quite a bit of competition. We noticed this year for the first time since I've been dealing with legislation that there were a group of so-called liberals, at least they are liberals insofar as voting for urban redevelopment and so forth, a group of liberals for the first time joined with the people that have always been against farm

programs to vote against an extension of the '65 Agricultural Act.

B: On the grounds that--

G: That they needed the money. Take Senator [Abraham A.] Ribicoff, who I consider a liberal senator. He said this year in an article that he wrote for Reader's Digest that "I introduced legislation to kill the feed-grain and wheat program because under this legislation the government spends better than $2 billion dollars a year. If we had this $2 billion dollars a year in another area, it would build 100,000 to 200,000 homes for people in the cities and urban areas." So this is an example where you have competition. We do feel sometimes that we are left out because we only have 47 congressmen that now come from what we call rural areas, out of 435. We feel that we are being left out a lot of times. We can't get adequate consideration, and this year you may recall that in order to get even a one-year extension of the food and agricultural act of '65 that we had to tie it in with the food stamp program which would affect the city areas. We couldn't have gotten it unless we tied it in with food stamp program.

B: Is this a fairly recent development--this shift in emphasis? Or have the agriculture people seen it coming for a long time?

G: Well, most of us have seen it coming for a long time, but it developed this year more than any other time, and I think there are some contributing factors. The ghetto problem is worse than it has ever been before, and there has been more emphasis on it. Then, too, there has been emphasis on reduced funds and reducing government expenditures. In fact, we couldn't possibly get a piece of agricultural legislation now without the support of the President.

It would be impossible. When we got the '65 act passed, I made a little analysis. We got 40 Democratic votes, "yes" votes, from the five largest cities. This year on an extension of that act, we got only 13 of that 40. We got 27 "noes."

B: And was the difference presidential?

G: The difference was that the President had already announced that he wasn't going to be running, and then, too, a lot of urban legislation had already gotten through before our bill came up. He didn't have the power then that he had previously. And the difference was that in 1965 he personally got on the phone and called these people and said I need your vote for this farm piece of legislation.

B: And it has to be that for any legislation to get passed?

G: For the legislation, or for funds, either one. That's about the way it's got to be.

B: Do you figure that's likely to get worse?

G: It's got to get worse. It can't get any better because you are going to have more concentration of population, you are going to have fewer farms. We classify a rural district as one in which 20 percent on the people still live on farms. That's not very many, but we still classify that as a rural district, and there are only 47 of those left now.

B: There has been talk of solving the urban problem by getting people out of the cities into the rural areas.

G: We have done considerable work on this, and this has been one of Secretary Freeman's prime programs, to try to get a better rural-urban balance, he calls it. And we've done a lot in this area. The small towns, for example, an innumerable number of small towns do not

have adequate water or sewage systems. Through the Farmers Home Administration, we are now making loans for establishing of rural water and sewage systems. These are in small towns--1,000 people for example.

B: This is what you were talking about earlier, about improving the quality of life.

G: Improving the quality of life and getting better education, better roads, better telephone service, through the REA telephones, electricity. We've got most of the areas electrified now to where they can have electricity. And in 1960 this program of water and sewage loans wasn't even in existence. And this past year, if I am not mistaken, there were 132 loans made in my home state, North Carolina.

B: Granting that that would make life better for those people who are already in the small towns and rural districts, would it make people leave the cities?

G: I think it will. I think there is a natural, inborn feeling on the part of a lot of people that they would rather not be too crowded.

B: Yes, sir, but of course they have got to have some kind of work to do.

G: Well, we've done a lot toward getting industry out into these areas, too.

B: I would assume there would have to be industry, too, because agriculture now is so mechanized and will get more so, I assume.

G: Well, we think so, and we think there has got to be a combination of industry and agriculture, and there's more income now coming to people on farms from non-agricultural purposes than there was in 1960. This has helped bring about a better balance between farm people and

non-farm people. In 1960 the farm people had per capita income of only 55 percent of the non-farm people. In 1968 they are going to have 73 percent.

B: Does "farm people," by that definition mean landowners?

G: These are people living on farms.

B: Living on farms?

G: Yes.

B: In these matters, you must have to work pretty closely with, say, HEW, HUD?

G: Yes, we do. We work with HEW, and with HUD. In fact, Secretary Freeman you may recall sponsored a five cabinet member meeting on getting better balance between rural and urban areas.

B: Do you work at your level, too, with your counterparts in those departments?

G: Yes we do. We do quite a bit of work with them.

B: Is there much inter-departmental rivalry in that kind of thing?

G: You know, I've been in government thirty-four years, and I can truthfully say that if there is one thing that has been accomplished during the Kennedy-Johnson administration, that there is less inter-governmental rivalry now than has ever been before.

B: Why is that? What has been done to--

G: I think it's created by more direction from the top and saying that we are accomplishing this for the good of all people, and we are all going to work together.

B: Has the President, either Mr. Kennedy or Mr. Johnson, had a way of finding out cases where something has been obstructed by--

G: Yes, I think it has been because of the efficient staffs, and I think

there has been more openness on the part of top-level officials and cabinet members and sub-cabinet members and so forth, to report things like that if they don't get the cooperation. Here in the department the secretary's staff meeting, has done much to eliminate the rivalry between agencies in the department. I can recall back in the fifties even during the Eisenhower Administration when the administrators of the different agencies in the department didn't even know each other. And that's unheard of today. We discuss our problems every morning. Everybody knows everyone else.

B: At these morning meetings, say you were having difficulty with someone over in HUD or HEW. Would you tell Secretary Freeman who then passes it to the President?

G: Yes, I'll tell him. He might give me a clue as to who to go to a little higher or something to work it out, and add, "Now, if I have to get involved, get me in."

B: But there is some effort made to keep these from--to settle them at the lowest possible level?

G: Oh, yes. And you would be amazed at how many times you can get them settled at a lower level when you say, "Now, I might have to get Secretary Freeman in on it."

B: And I suppose if he replies by, "I might have to get my secretary," then you just both back off and let the secretaries have it?

G: This has happened. And I've been in on some of those conferences when the secretaries got together. We had major sugar legislation I didn't mention earlier that we had to negotiate through the Congress. Of course sugar legislation involves the State Department to a considerable degree because it's written in an effort to benefit some foreign,

less developed nations as well as to benefit our consumers and our sugar producers. So there have been many instances where the secretaries had to get together on sugar, and in the case of cotton they have had to get together because of the import and export problems.

B: Is a large department like agriculture, or even a large area like yours, is it susceptible to change. That is, if a new President comes in, Mr. Johnson specifically, and has a certain emphasis in a certain area, is the permanent staff susceptible to this kind of direction?

G: Generally. I might say--

B: What I'm trying to do is to find a subtle, polite way of asking the question about bureaucracy.

G: I might say here that a lot of the people in agriculture started in the early days of farm programs in the early thirties. Agriculture didn't get to be a major department until then. That was about when we started, 1933, the Roosevelt administration. So a lot of the people around here now came in during the Roosevelt administration and have devoted a lot of their life to this. This is a civil service group. Now, generally, with a President like President Johnson who was trained in the Roosevelt era also, they would follow whatever direction he wanted them to go. Now, these same people were here during the Eisenhower-Benson days and I know of in a number of cases where Benson, of course, was trying to kill farm programs. He'd give the orders in his office that never got any further than the hall outside of his office. These people were just determined that it wasn't going to happen.

B: And they can stop it from happening?

G: Oh, yes, they can do it. They can make any program work or they can make any program ineffective. But generally the programs that President Kennedy and Johnson both have advocated are the type of programs that Roosevelt advocated--programs for the people, to improve the lot of the human being, and that's what they are interested in. They are not interested in somebody doing away with the program that is helping people.

B: Is the general attitude here in the department any different between the Kennedy and the Johnson years? Has Johnson's New Deal Southern-Western background made the Agriculture Department more simpatico?

G: No, I would say the major difference is in the legislative field. Johnson, because of his experience, had more knowledge and a different technique for dealing with the Hill than President Kennedy. President Kennedy had more difficulty in getting legislation passed on the Hill than President Johnson. And this, I guess, is because of their experience and the way they go about it. President Johnson when history is written will show that he got a tremendous amount of progressive legislation, a tremendous amount, and that he was responsible for it, and that all the criticism that he has received was completely unjustified in my opinion.

B: Why do you think he has gotten all the criticisms?

G: The changing times and the speed of change, the rapid change. The human being, mind or body, is not able to absorb the rapid change that we are going through. Things are changing just too fast, and we become frustrated. When my child comes home from school with eighth grade arithmetic that I didn't even have in college, it is a little frustrating.

B: I know that feeling myself.

G: It is a little frustrating, and you begin thinking about sitting in your living room and listening and watching the astronauts circling the earth, and it is a little frustrating whether you realize it or not. It's frustrating. How can this happen when you yourself can't even understand the telephone, and how it works.

B: Incidentally, does this apply more directly to agriculture. I know--

G: Well, it does apply to agriculture.

B: When I see those Delta cotton fields with a machine picking the cotton when during my childhood there were cotton pickers by the hundreds, I realize the tremendous change that has taken place.

G: Yeah, this is frustrating, too. How does a machine do this? What's going to be the next step?

B: I would think that latter part would be the key to having seen so much change in sort of an accelerated process.

G: I think this is responsible for a lot of our people saying, "Bring me something that was invented today or yesterday. Don't let me look back, because it's got to be new."

B: Do you have, within your area here, a man or a group of men who are trying to predict what is going to happen in, say, the agricultural technology so that you can base--

G: Well, the Agricultural Research Service does this primarily, not in ASCS. ASCS is what we call the action agency. In other words, we administer the programs of action type dealing directly with the farmer. We have the Economic Research Service and the Ag Research Service that both get into this area.

B: Sir, is there anything else you think we should have covered that we

have not?

G: Well, we didn't cover in detail the passage of the one-year extension of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1965, this year.

B: Do you want to go into that?

G: President Johnson was very instrumental in helping us get this through. We started out to make it permanent. We saw that we could get only four years in the Senate. We got the four years in the Senate. And we got back over to the House and we were unable to get anything other than one year in the House. And we wouldn't have gotten that without the President's help.

B: That was--let me get the time straight--that was this year, the '65 act, came up--

G: In '68, it would expire--the '65 act would have expired in '69.

B: And came up for renewal--

G: We wanted to renew it in '68 because before we could get it renewed in '69, we would have to make some decisions on wheat, for example. So we wanted to do it in '68.

B: You wanted a permanent one?

G: We wanted it made permanent. And he recommended this in his Ag message. Then we told the Senate four years. And then because of many things in the House we were able to get only one year. Actually, I think we could have gotten more than one year had it not been for solid opposition from the Republican Party to more than a one-year extension.

B: Presidential politics involved in that?

G: Yes. Candidate Nixon's name was used on the floor to the effect that he only wanted a one-year extension.

B: Was the race issue involved in it, too?

G: No, the race issue did not come up at all. The expenditure of federal funds, big payments did come up.

B: Did Mr. Johnson's withdrawal have an adverse effect on your getting the legislation?

G: I think it did. I think if he had not made his announcement, I believe that we could possibly have gotten through a four-year bill.

B: Anything else, sir?

G: No, I guess there are many, many other things that you could get along the way.

B: Probably a number of things that I don't know enough about to ask an intelligent question of, too.

G: So many things happen in a job like this until you--unless you keep a daily diary and go back through all of it, you just forget them because--.

B: Of course, they will be in the written record.

G: There are a lot of things in the written record. That's about all I can think of.

B: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

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By Horace D. Godfrey

to the

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