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(Pendleton, Oregon)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
AT THE
AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS RECEPTION

PENDLETON MEMORIAL ARMORY

2:30 P.M. PDT

THE PRESIDENT: Let me thank all of you for coming here, not only for the meeting outside, but to have an opportunity to meet you personally and to say a few words.

I can't express deeply enough my appreciation for what American agriculture has done for our country. I know that we have had some ups and downs in agriculture. I can remember when I first went to the Congress back in January of 1949. We had for the next 10 or 15 years -- maybe longer -- tremendous surpluses that depressed your market that resulted in the Department of Agriculture; in effect, having too great a role in how you ran your farms and how you handled your crops.

The programs that have been in effect for the last several years I think are a major step forward in giving agriculture the opportunity to do what they do so well -- to produce, and to permit us as a country to maximize our exports overseas.

Let me tell you how significant your contribution is. In 1973, the United States paid about \$7 billion to \$8 billion for foreign oil. Last year, the United States paid for foreign oil about the same amount in quantity, but \$35 billion -- from \$7 billion or \$8 billion up to \$35 billion.

If we had not had the exports of American agriculture that we have had the last two or three years, this country would be in very, very sad economic condition, because the expansion of American exports abroad -- corn and wheat and soybeans and all of the other crops -- if we hadn't had the benefit of your hard work, your skill and your productivity, the United States would have been in very, very serious condition now economically.

So, although many Americans don't understand or don't therefore appreciate your contribution, as President, on behalf of them, I want to thank you, because America is better today because of what you here in Oregon and what others have done -- in North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Oklahoma, Washington. The great productivity in wheat and corn and soybeans has been a significant factor, if not one of the major factors, in the ability of America to turn the economy around in the last 12 months.

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So, I thank you and 215 million other Americans thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

I would be glad to answer any questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will labor stop our exports any more?

THE PRESIDENT: They certainly won't, and I think you are raising a question that others have raised. The allegation has been made without fact or foundation that President Ford capitulated to some labor leaders.

Let me tell you, I vetoed the situs picketing bill, and that wasn't something that they appreciated very much. So, let me assure you that there is no circumstance that I can foresee, none whatsoever, that there will be any limitation on the exports of American agriculture, certainly as far as the next four years.

So I say to you that nobody, labor or any other segment of our society, is going to interfere with the kind of things that must be done to help feed the world, to help our farmers make an honest living and a prosperous living, and to give the American people the kind of prosperity that I think we can achieve with the kind of programs we have today.

QUESTION: Mr. President, is the Administration keeping a close watch on the meat imports?

THE PRESIDENT: We certainly are. We have just about consummated the import limitation that will set, I think, a figure that will be very sound. I think it will be constructive. The announcement on that should be forthcoming very shortly, and I think it will be effective and I think it will be helpful.

Well, let me thank you all. I can't express deeply enough my appreciation for you all taking a Sunday afternoon. It is a pleasure for me to meet you.

END (AT 2:38 P.M. PDT)