policy. They were hardly unanimous in their views, however, and they were never as isolated from outside-the-network political demands as iron-triangle theory would suggest.[35] Never could that be in America.

7. Networking worked so well with the congressional Farm Bloc—and later through its informal farm bloc successor in Congress—that pressure for such cooperation spread to issue areas *within* the sector.[36] Networking actually was so consistent with the respected management theories of Max Weber that it spread widely within the other structures of American public institutions, such as Congress and agricultural research.

8. Networking developed as a means of lowering what at the time were escalating transaction costs in 1920s farm policymaking. The need for easier decision making seems ironic at first. After all, more and more Agricultural Establishment institutions appear to have been easily created in the 19th century, even under *laissez-faire* conditions. Yet that ease is apparent only if one links agricultural to national development and if one links capitalist interests to the desire to educate and civilize those always suspect agrarians.[37]

9. Networking in the 20th century was merely a derivative of such transaction-cost thought, as more and more semi-institutionalized interests and institutionalized administrative personnel came to press their policy demands along with the direct voices of farmers. Farmer power, in this regard, never stood alone. It stood with the power of these others. Indeed, it was the state that mattered most as an organizing entity, in terms of what it provided and what it inspired politically within society. It was the incomplete state that, despite its capacity, left out attention to rural America. It was too costly and potentially debilitating to that existing state capacity to fight that battle, too.

10

THE IMPOSSIBLE TASK *of* RURAL ADVOCACY

We now shift our attention away from the best friends but bad guys of rural policy: farm policy beliefs, farm institutions, farm interests, and farmer allies. Let's focus instead on the problems with the strategies of rural policy reform within the Agricultural Establishment and what's been wrong with them—often, unavoidably so. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 look at the negligible prospects for rural advocacy. Can the past be holding back the present, and the future as well? Of course it does—and it will, in all likelihood. Chapter 13 draws a contrast with a more successful agricultural policy reform effort: the environmental movement. This essay then finishes in chapter 14 with some lessons about badly disadvantaged public policies in the always challenging and often high-capacity—that is, organizationally capable—American nation-state.

This chapter turns to the essence of the rural lobbying problem. Advocacy for the rural community and its disadvantaged populations has become as near to impossible as things can be in national politics. Unless one wants very little, and (as I have emphasized often) something that is highly particularistic or selective, in all likelihood it won't be won. At the heart of today's rural advocacy dilemma lies not only the distant past. The past as it's still played out leaves rural interests extraordinarily weak in terms of the evolving let's-get-together network politics of contemporary Washington, D.C. Yet that past would leave those interests little better off were they to rely on strong partisan advocates or successful, mostly pro-farm agricultural institutions.

The following two sections explain the reasons. The first section drags up some old rock-and-roll lyrics to emphasize and paraphrase the point that rural interests "have no place to run." No stable of trusted insider-politics friends exist. Nor, as the second section reminds us, do advocates of rural issues and interests have anywhere to hide their proposed strategies. No

ballistic lobbying plans can be found in dark closets. There are few secret strategies to be developed in a wide-open national politics that would rocket previously neglected issues such as these to the forefront—at least, not without the corruption of old or new and shocking crises of the present to drive them.

NO PLACE TO RUN

Everyone, particularly those with time in the political process, has friends in Washington. Wow! Life is like that. Having friends doesn't mean the same thing, however, as being able to reliably count on them, or even trust them for one's own political purposes.[1] Friends are just a first step to advocacy success. Yet, as the folk wisdom of winning friends and allies would suggest, people try it again and again as if it's the end itself. Not surprisingly, then, friendship politics has been at the center of rural reform advocacy for the past two decades—to little avail.

The conventional rule has been simple: Make influential friends who occupy the correct institutional or interest positions in your area of policy. Then use them, as leaders in advocacy in their own right.[2] No matter what positions they occupy inside or outside of government, and no matter whether they know they're to be the leader. Lobbyists can come from anywhere, but they should understand that they're leaders. Unfortunately for rural advocates, the conventional results have been as simple as the conventional wisdom. The influentials, the friends, eventually leave the reformers alone to lose. Other entangling establishment relationships and institutional tasks prove more formidable than what once seemed plausible avenues with probable leadership players for policy change. One-time sympathizers find that their responsibilities to farm services or to other, more influential, interests are so entangling that their rural sympathies lag. In reality, there is no one to run to on behalf of quick and often creative fixes. The following are the most prominent examples of failures to perceive the flawed relationship between simple rules and no less simple results since the mid-1980s.

Example 1: Look for the most experienced and hardest-driving lobbyist leader, the eminence of reform respectability. Several people with strong rural backgrounds felt they had found such a point person in the early 1990s: Susan Sechler. This foundation executive was the easy choice; she had high status from her special interest job; considerable flexibility in recommending the foundations' advocacy funding projects; a reputation as an activist in anti-farm policy efforts, beginning with the 1970s' Agricultural Accountability

Project; and experience as an outspoken ally of nearly every social cause interest group that had recently spoken badly of farm programs.[3]

Sechler's attributes included Washington's warmest personal charm—tenaciousness; widespread and loyal contacts throughout the Agricultural Establishment; good friends in USDA; and Democratic party loyalty in what was a forthcoming Clinton administration era. She had instant, widespread visibility, if supported properly. Wasn't this a modern female John Muir, early Sierra Club, heroine and dreamweaver? At first glance, yes. In personal sympathy, most certainly. In political reality, she was not a rural advocate at heart but a more general Establishment reformer: too general a rebel, chewing off too much—especially because nobody said, "We depend on you."

As a consequence, things did not work out, at least in terms of specific rural policy leadership. The respected reformer proved to be too esteemed and too valued by too many others. Her issue niche, as her source of her own political identity and the means by which others identified her as an activist, was not as a rural expert.[4] Rural interests were just part of her clientele. Moreover, rural policy and problems were hardly her background, through her education or her experiences as an attack lobbyist. "I have a goal," she once said, "of course I do; I want to change the whole damned (agricultural) system, piss them all off."[5]

This tenacity and sweeping set of policy goals led to relationships within nearly all of the social cause interests—and their sympathizers—that have sought to be included in agricultural policy change and inclusion since 1973.[6] Consumer groups, nutrition groups, child welfare groups, poverty lobbies, sustainable agriculture organizations, and even anti-biotechnology interests were her informal clientele on numerous issues. Environmental interests were particularly prominent. So too were several leftist and Democratic-leaning think tanks.[7] In addition, she took considerable advice from many respected—if not always mainstream—authorities from traditional agriculture. Grants from her foundations went in numerous directions of public policy: not just for rural interests, and not just for reformists. Advocacy was not always on her immediate agenda; plans were often being made for more long-term future Establishment assaults.

In short, the Eminent Reformer was more of a coalition leader among a not otherwise allied set of emerging social cause groups, interests, and individual policy players. Most of these players, of course, were just in the process of finding places for themselves within or opposing the Agricultural Establishment. Thus, they were in competition among themselves for reputations and operating resources. Sechler's services to too many of them were far too broad and their impact therefore too limited on any one of

them. Such ineffectual advocacy made specific rural program institutions and interests unlikely to be effectively mobilized and followed—especially because she didn't know she was supposed to.

Example 2: Let's captivate the White House. So why not go to the very top? Try the presidency—in 1993, the new home of Arkansas' Bill Clinton. After all, the history of serious rural policy initiatives has been about presidents more than Congress or even administrative professionals. So let's plant ideas with the president and hope he follows their logic.

Several other more contemporary factors also made Clinton a target—one who could have been a rural policy leader. First, as Arkansas governor Clinton had acquired a reputation as a new-style southern politician who was willing to break with traditionally conservative state forces such as rice producers and their cooperatives.[8] Second, he had networked extensively with many professional policy analysts, by himself and within prestigious national forums. Observers saw him as a policy-oriented, solution-focused politico rather than one of the policy process's good old boys, playing only on behalf of personal favorites. Third, Arkansas indeed was a rural state, seemingly less focused (to Governor Clinton) on farming than on a necessary new dynamics of progressive economic development: jobs, opportunities, and more jobs. Finally, Clinton's urbane and intellectual manner made him an approachable public official. As the reasoning went, he should have been someone who would work with similar people who had positive attitudes toward policy reforms linked to social causes and liberal politics, especially in the new South.

No one, however, found rough-and-tumble Bill Clinton to be cut from the Roughrider Teddy Roosevelt model on rural issues. Even when a simple strategy evolved to commit Clinton and his administration to Agricultural Establishment reform, he never seemed to listen. The costs of doing so by new guys in town were potentially very high. Why rock a boat that's lying still? No reason; don't: Let's keep middle-class interests happy and content. Perhaps ignorance indeed was bliss in those early but novel White House years.

What was the plan? Rely on her Eminence of Reform's liberal respectability to position herself with the new administration. The match was politically sound, though ultimately suspect. The reformer and her allies were able to win for her the position as head of the Clinton administration's transition team for federal agriculture and food appointees. What was the hope? If the strategy were successful, it would have created considerable influence for her in bringing in top-level layers of politically appointed, nontraditional USDA and related agency administrators. New social-cause folks, not the old aggies that the reformer always hoped to piss off, would

be in charge of much if not all Establishment reform in the remaining years of the 20th century.

What happened? Well, the initial Clinton rhetoric sounded good—progressive, democratic, open policymaking with a reform prospective for rural people. The administration's action, however, belied any intent behind such rhetoric. As talent collection procedures sought candidates for the transition team and as numerous types of influentials made recommendations for those who could become ranking policymakers, the new wave of agricultural policy reform advocates were visibly ignored. Neither other transition team members nor White House liaison appointees were taken by this reformist troop. Despite considerable efforts to compromise, the new administration appointed more of the same old types of farm policy proponents. Fewer dissenters were incorporated into USDA under Clinton than there had been in the Carter administration. Even traditional farm and agribusiness forces—and state personalities—from Arkansas won more favored positions and voices in USDA than did national policy reformers.

Without an administration that was intent on inclusion and promoting new values, the plan and the target were inoperative. In the largest sense, both were unlikely to pay out anyway. Those with institutional status had merely to pass on that status—and its accompanying responsibilities and perceived policy successes—in their recommendations for appointments. Accepting traditional recommendations was a safe course of action for a White House that for all practical purposes had no use for a high transaction cost farm and food policy war. Thus, the motto was, let's go with society's most prominent and well-to-do agricultural experts. There were too many other policy battles possible, more visible and attractive ones to fight—such as health care reform.

For the agricultural reformists who tried to instigate such a war, however, the new and now old administration seemed worse than merely timid. Her Eminence concluded, "It was all about paying attention to the old boys, the used-up ideas, the neglect of accountability. Those things were never gone. The whole bunch of them [Clinton's folks] proved their own corruption so easily and so early."[9] So institutions and interests maintained their ongoing win streaks against issues that found only the most minimal popular support. Even when farm policy activists and players agreed to a phase-out of farm price supports, Clinton expressed only reluctant support. He wasn't sure this reform would work. It was a deed of Congress—one that its members should pay for in the case of failure.

Example 3: How about an agriculture committee chair from a rural but mostly urbane and polished New England state? For a similar lesson, return to the late

1980s. Let's set the target and sights of the lobbying artillery at a symbolically slightly lower level, however—an individual (and a most influential public official) who was more likely to be convinced. Sights were set after a quick scan of what often gets called the institutional keystone of the Washington establishment—that is, the correct congressional committee.[10] The idea was to interest a single entrepreneurial agriculture committee member who could carry other members along in passing the Bush administration's aforementioned Rural Development Act.

Who would do it? After all, agriculture committee members tended to come from a variety of states and districts dependent on farm politics (except for African American members who could be advocates for food and urban poverty positions). So these members usually are old aggies, with their own institutionalization in the funding and authorization policy center of the Agricultural Establishment. This was a problem.

There were a few exceptions, however, from places that were not as farm oriented. Two such places were obvious: the rural Southeast, where many neighborhoods within districts were nonfarm and suburban, and the Northeast, where farming had largely exhausted itself. Mostly that northern region was characterized by forests, tourism, and some small, economically stressed dairy farms. Such was the very politically avoidable New Hampshire, an otherwise volatile state that is famous for its presidential primaries. Yet there also were Connecticut and Vermont, for example, which are known for their suburban and commuter nature, prestigious colleges, and upscale vacationing—as well as a few cows. Perhaps that suburbanized environment would best produce a rural congressional advocate. So it did, and one was selected: the liberal Democratic chair of the Senate agriculture committee—a man known to be frequently hostile to commodity programs that weren't always fair, in his eyes, to his state's producers. Not incidentally, he also was in need of a restored image. His previously sound partisan but very prominent senatorial (read lordly) reputation had been harmed by an indiscrete foreign policy intervention that received great publicity and brought considerable personal distress. So this guy was happy to take up the bill as his own, even though no one told him that he was to be boss leader of the whole Rural Development Act (RDA) battle.

Patrick Leahy was to be a good, sympathetic figure who could find a nonfarm following on an independent bill. And he would have an ally: A rural lobbyist who would later receive foundation financing in the 1990s, Robert Rapoza, would work as closely as possible with Leahy's office to coordinate a bill, deliver legislative and administrative support, and rouse the support of any of several lurking rural interests and coalitions. This certainly could

have done Vermont proud, right down to its traditional rural values of clean air and healthy lifestyles and hoped-for respect for its national leaders. For Leahy and Vermont, it was good restorative politics, as well as good reform politics.

Neither Leahy nor Rapoza could quite deliver, though. The bill and its support would seemingly fall together, but without much enthusiasm on the Hill. Then just as easily it would collapse, without fanfare. At least some farm state interests and members of Congress were needed to pass their committees' legislation; in the end, these forces would not accept the tenets of a distinctly rural bill. "They tricked us repeatedly," said Rapoza at the end, "just lied."[11] It was something he said again in 1992, after he found more lying about the 1990 farm bill.

What "they" as institutional pieces really did was even easier than lying. What appeared to be acquiescent, even passive, RDA supporters wanted rural policy to stay within that tradition of farm policy—or the next (1985) farm bill. So the collective efforts of old farm policy institutionalists flanked Leahy and moved discussions of the RDA and its most desirable and particularistic (special favor) proposals to deliberations over that pending omnibus bill. The House of Representatives led the way, of course, quietly and quickly. In that sense, the institutionalized were thieves, not liars. Theft from Leahy, or turf management by the House, lowered the transaction costs of any sort of political battle, or words of violent disagreement that might otherwise have been heard.

Example 4: Let's just find some little congressman, a guy with basic legislative needs. This idea was business as usual, not engineering a miracle of superior legislative strategy. Congress, after all, operated from Washington, not Lourdes or another blessed place such as Fatima.

Therefore, numerous affected interests looked for agricultural committee members who had expressed sympathy with specific RDA proposals—the particularistic special favors—and had some reason to act on them. Several rank-and-file leaders emerged, all tying themselves (mostly) to just one type of program: their own. All of them knew they were leaders—fronting, of course, for various organized interests. The most easily understood response was by a western drylands-state congressman. His constituents were affected by recurring drought, groundwater decline in aquifers, and growing incidents of water wells being polluted by farm chemical use.

This congressman had a perfect opportunity to promote something that was visibly and obviously of local consequence. And he did, championing centralized rural water delivery systems, or farm and rural water through big tubes. Interest support was extensive, of course. Contractors were

jubilant. Local industry welcomed rural water stability. Many farmers felt relief from future problems. As a result, the Honorable Mr. Dryland Gulch found that he had lobbyists who would work hard with his staff for his cause in the pending farm bill, who could show local applications of rural water systems already in operation. They rallied supporters, raised campaign funds, encouraged press coverage, and spoke often of environmental safety as this member's rather surprising (even to him) forte. In short, Mr. Gulch, like other members of Congress, won basic legislative needs—his own, for winning reelection and for gaining a reputation in the House as a political doer.

What happened? Rural water systems became an important if small component of the pending omnibus farm bill. It was one of numerous issues that made the 1990 farm bill vehicle desirable and, for many, a progressive act.[12] Yet, in a peculiar but not surprising way, water systems did more, by restoring Establishment prominence. They were argued for, advanced, and promoted as unique and necessary extensions of farm policy. Rural water was quite like that old rural electricity: an evolving and very much needed component of the many institutions of farm modernization and development. It was popular, in effect, because water systems were regarded as important components of a continuously developing Agricultural Establishment. Therein lies the advantage of Congress playing what major league baseball players often call "small ball."[13]

Neither Mark McGwire nor some other policy star was there hitting mighty home runs on an RDA. Plenty of rank-and-file infielders were there, however, to bloop single runs home over third—repeatedly. Several players drove in others from third base. As they did so, they won small-scale policy games. The farm institutions were then friendly. Interests were all calm. Transaction costs stayed low. The efforts of 1862 continued right through the millenium, even with a difficult 1995 farm bill still to write.

NO PLACE TO HIDE

A tale such as this one sometimes, for some readers, produces the unintentional result of raising a cheering section. The idea is one team—the entrenched farm policy folks—versus an underdog rural policy team (or even all of the anti-farm policy reformers as a team). The policy game with the baseball analogy probably fosters the let's-form-a-cheering-section approach.

If it helps in understanding the policy process in agriculture, use that two-team analogy, even though it's not exact or even always very accurate

in describing policy play. Why use it, then? One reason predominates: There *is* a semblance of an underdog team. It's united only around unplanned and uncoordinated goals of Agricultural Establishment and food policy reform. This isn't a solid nine, but its opposition status still evokes team imagery. Thus, members of the public who hear about various reform positions such as the environment, agricultural trade, food safety, consumer rights, and rural policy can attract a social-cause cheering section, if they're so inclined. It may be important over time. Remember political theorist E. E. Schattschneider? He warned that, in an American political battle, you should watch the crowd as the determining factor.[14] The crowd can always expand directly into the conflict, *if* it wants. It may become dominant.

To an extent, this expansion to the battling public from the backroom-inclined organized interests has already occurred.[15] Seattle, Washington, served as a major battleground when environmentally concerned protestors of various sorts blocked World Trade Organization meetings in late 1999. Similar protests and disruptions took place in Washington, D.C., in 2000. Expansion of opposition issues has at least led many citizens to be frightened of the consequences of large-scale agricultural production and the subsequent, often international handling of components of food production—from genetics to seafood inspection. For some Americans, these fears have led to the formation of a strategic question: What should be organized and done?

For a few of those who are pondering that question, the answer lies in forming a widespread social movement from a grassroots public that is increasingly supportive of opposition politics. The "them-against-us" team concept then enters. A return to grassroots silver policy and economic reform movements of the 19th century is the presumed model for such change, even though it's a horribly outmoded model.[16] More contemporary politics suggests that if such an opposition politics were applied today, it would have to be more complex, more alive with already organized and vital interests, better informed about scientific conditions, and better able to plan and carry out the provision of political incentives for those participants.[17] Nonetheless, public opposition roots and cheers for its already recognizable but still emergent dissident advocacy cohort in national politics.

Moreover, citizens logically yet naively ask: Why don't these various and assorted folks simply get together and form a sweeping agricultural policy revolt? Why not put together a well-planned and highly specific set of reforms as absolute political demands—or shut their town down? This question, of course, implies the idea of surprising the traditional agricultural institutions and the traditional agriculturists, as well as bringing unantici-

pated challenges to previously dominant public policy ideas, values, and beliefs. It happens—but very rarely.[18] Generally it's carried out by those who use terrorist tactics (against, for example, animal experimentation or genetically altered crops by burning the lab or destroying the crop in the field).

There also is a flaw in the two-team analogy, however: There is no all-powerful 1927 New York Yankees unit on the field, no institutional team. That Establishment is not organized as a strictly competitive unit against those who want even severe farm policy change. That's too far-fetched, totally inaccurate, and no surprise to readers of chapter 8. A better analogy than the team is that of the league. A league houses several teams, or networks as parts, all of whom routinely have some nominal overlap and interaction through the policy games they unavoidably share. They also share a self-interest in ensuring that each of the networks (teams) is sound and competitive. Social scientists, who always want their own language, have taken to calling the leagues "policy domains."[19] There's some importance in this notion, as we shall see.

America's modernizing and developing agriculture certainly has come to be such a domain in its historical evolution. As the nation's earliest policy domain, it also may be the best-integrated and most certain of its need for collective success.[20] That's true even as agriculture lacks comprehensiveness and coordinated policies and programs, or even an essence of shared policy values. Yet no domain players want the other institutionally connected networks (teams) in their league to appear inept, foolish, or less than winners. So they share ideas and information among themselves. Why? Because they also share policy space in the competitive world of government legislation, budgeting, and finance. If one loses, the others may lose as well—simply by looking weak. Yes, each network (team) organizes itself, raises its own capital, and makes its own trades, but the domain sets the schedule and hosts the World Series.

So why consider the policy domain at this point? Again, the answer lies with better descriptive reality than the weaker two-team analogy allows. The domain concept implies, first, acceptance of that common theme of an always modernizing and developing agriculture as a national goal; that is the policy space. Second, it implies that Weberian networks of specialized bureaucratic expertise are considerably free to go their own way—unless they are terribly wrong or lacking in some degree of neutral competence. That's also regarded as bureaucratic inertia. Third, the domain implies accountability not only through administrative leadership but also through institutionalized politics and the numerous and growing number of clien-

tele interests that are allied, or semi-institutionalized, into league play. The regular players are a domain constant; they turn over and change slowly. Controversy at some level also is a domain constant, externally and more so internally as different policy values of different programs conflict. In the baseball analogy, the Cubs, for example, always claim superiority over the Cardinals, although both preach the inherent superiority of the National League and, more particularly, the Central Division.

Fourth, that latter point means that domain institutions are continuously subject to modification and alteration of what they do, the programs they operate, and even how they go about doing things. Remember, the 2000 Cubs once sought to trade Sammy Sosa. Safe and nutritious food is a policy good that recently has been appended to the core goal of farm modernization and development, for instance. No one ever thought of it in the 19th century. Fifth, the scientific traditions of the Agricultural Establishment and early commitment to even imperfect analysis encourage such inquisitive thought and recognition of the need for program and domain changes. Without that unique characteristic of adjustment, the Agricultural Establishment would never have stabilized and grown to be so influential over time.[21] Its paradigm of agrarian values would not have sustained agriculture alone, no matter how ingrained it was in American culture and how protective the Madisonian and Jeffersonian structure of interest-group government was. The myth was constantly updated at the margins.

A resulting question always permeates the agricultural policy process, then. Domain participants—the actual players on the teams—want to know how to be responsive to new information about their assigned areas of expertise. No one wants to look like a Neanderthal or have the agriculture "tribe" look like a bunch of Neanderthals. There's always guilt by association. Players then aspire to maintain their expertise and their resulting political credibility, often with coercion from other players, teams, and league leaders. They listen widely through their networking activities, and they are especially careful to hear and follow the criticisms of those who would bring competition to their unique fields of thought.

Domain participants also are at an advantage in securing information. Research staffing is extensive; research projects grow in number and purpose, with greater attention going to new-value or social-cause reform problems; information generation and collection mechanisms are superior; network opportunities are plentiful and available, and players learn about each others' strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, continuous warnings flash that agriculture is subject to great political pressure, especially public opinion.

After all, public opinion reflects consumer choices, and consumer choices are what semi-institutionalized food manufacturing and processing interests hope to cultivate. With its size and numbers, agriculture is hardly sacrosanct or free from successful political assault. This is a powerful inducement for responsible change, especially as accompanied by competing signs of administrative decline—smaller budgets, greater workloads, more difficult operational questions, more public and media criticism, less authorization for political position-taking or posturing.

So what for the dissenting team—the opposition that would reform the Agricultural Establishment? Many of these players, like the attorneys who represent agribusiness firms, are by necessity domain players as well—though it may not look that way at first glance. Without participating and gathering information from inside the domain, reformist ideas lack grounding and established conventional sense. Dissidents are known and evaluated, their ideas subject to review, their friendships often sought, and their own expertise often valued. Often, more central domain players finance their efforts. All of this lowers the long-term, or accommodative, transaction costs of dealing with the social-cause reformists—unless, of course, they're fringe status, terrorist ideologues.

Thus, at least some dissenting, new-value, reform positions are routinely incorporated into the essential work of the Agricultural Establishment, though not as quickly or as thoroughly or perhaps as diligently as the opposition would hope. Trust is still a problem for them, as well as for institutionalists who would necessarily have to give it (see chapter 7). The Braves, for instance, will never trust the Mets, but they welcome their close competition. It's good for the league, the domain of both teams. Most important for reform opponents , however, that style of incorporating new policy values into the agricultural political process prevents, in Establishment eyes, a food policy revolution. The opposition therefore must operate openly, in a public forum, in order to cultivate that fear. It must reveal its aspirations, dislikes, and goals—and its plots. Mobilization of a social cause means noise.[22] No silent armies can be brought out suddenly to overthrow much of anything. For the Agricultural Establishment's opposition, there's nowhere to hide for a secret assault, any more than there's been a secret leader for them to find who will change the policymaking equation more heavily in their favor, or in favor of rural America. Sechler, Clinton, Leahy, and even the Honorable Dryland Gulch were well known to all—and in all cases suspiciously studied. Opponents may well be in positions to move to the other team, if they wish. More likely, they'll change teams by signing onto those old farm bills.

IMPLICATIONS

The meaning of this chapter is quite clear. Better yet, that meaning can be stated succinctly. Rural advocates by the late 20th century were behaving as if they understood a basic political principle regarding their own vincibility. An alternative national rural policy apart from national farm policy appears impossible for all of the reasons cited in previous chapters. Those reasons range from institutional reluctance to farm interest politics to the political lethargy of rural residents. Yet no one in the rural advocacy community would disagree with the need for at least a limited and independent national rural policy that addresses community decline in isolated places, economic development in neglected regions, and poverty.

There is little agreement beyond that, however, in part because of the conditions noted in chapter 2. Some rural proponents insist on complete rural revitalization efforts everywhere—as a sort of reborn 1960s Great Society initiative. Big government lives in that ideal. At the other extreme, other sympathetic proponents propose a very cautious plan for rural policy. These advocates include policy professionals who would have to work directly with isolated, empty, and resourceless places. Their sense of practicality rules. Since the 1980s, rural policy proponents have joked about what they could realistically do for the "shitty little communities" (SLCs) or SLTs (towns).[23] Most have feared that program implementation would likely fail—that some places, such as the woods of New Hampshire, must be left to nature's way of adaptation.

With such divergent views and assorted middleground positions, rural lobbying has hardly occupied a political high ground. It shows in the rural lobbies' most recent strategic choices. The incentives have been to ally rural advocates with a wide range of reform interests that are highly critical of—even very angry about—the Agricultural Establishment on several counts. Unfortunately for the reformers, each interest has its own agenda and wants, and each one lives mostly in its own network within or close to the agricultural policy domain. As a consequence, there is little likelihood of a successfully broad reform movement, even as more of the public expresses food-related anxieties and anger—and even as criticisms of farm policy mount.

None of that negates the processes of policy and institutional change within the Agricultural Establishment. Reformers get attention; some reforms go on. That is to say, some social causes are called up to the major leagues. At a professional service center for those who are charged with

fostering neutral competence, new ideas and criticisms freely enter the agricultural policy process. As members of often challenged political organizations, administrators and agency experts address criticisms and respond (at least halfheartedly) to suggestions made about their own hopeless neglect. So does Congress. New research, new programs, new ideas, and new values then pop right up in USDA, the land grants, Extension, and agricultural research. They simply may not pop up as highly and as visibly as traditional issues raised by traditional farm and business interests; the more extreme views may not—probably won't—pop up at all. Nor may any of them be fully embraced. The controversy does encourage attention, however, and new policy evolves. The Pittsburgh Pirates usually get a little better within that National League Central Division every year—though not much.

Three conclusions are evident. Rural policy reform is not an independent movement—or at least, not a very stable one. Anti-establishment reformers are not a political team that can effectively challenge the institutional strengths, policies, and organizations that went marching nearly 150 years ago. The criticisms brought to the Agricultural Establishment within its encompassing domain are important, however, for evolutionary change in policy and organizations. In that sense, the reformers matter because of their noise, their public, and their press. They are no silent threat, nor are all of their reform agendas capable of generating much of what would be called big picture change. Most of them will win, when they win at all, through "small ball"—that bloop hit over the shortstop's outstretched hands. Obviously, they'll win by having several players bunch hits together.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Let's stick to the lobbying basics in summarizing this chapter. The essentials have considerable value to anyone who wishes to promote—or even understand—rural policy or the reform of farm policy or otherwise politically but legally attack the Agricultural Establishment.

1. Rural policy victories are damned hard, with considerable odds stacked against them.

2. Neither contemporary national network politics, nor reliance on strong partisan leaders, nor the assistance of existing agricultural institutions do much to aid and abet rural lobbying.

3. The last two decades of the 20th century saw an interesting change in rural lobbying. Whereas rural policy proponents once merely addressed the logical needs of poor and declining communities, attention has shifted to other strategies of finding political visibility. Friendship strategies have prevailed, as especially prominent individuals have been used in attempts to raise the status of rural issues and generally encourage long-term Agricultural Establishment reform.

4. Such friendship lobbying has not proven to be reliable, however. It's too simplistic to work, at least as a strategic base. Relationships are too transient; trust is difficult to build; follow-through is difficult; targets are also targets for other, more institutionally entrenched, political forces; and the transaction costs of dealing positively with reform demands are too high. Escalation of costs and of ongoing battles is a mess. Farm interests still have power. Yet conflict avoidance generally leaves those old farm policy hands in charge. What to do is a good question.

5. The peculiar dynamics of high-visibility lobbying of more politically influential friends has had two effects on rural lobbying. First, the more numerous issues of broad policy reform of the Agricultural Establishment gain more attention because of the multitude of reform interests involved.[24] Elites of that lobby like the extra attention. There is a downside, however. Rural policy loses some of its individual political attention as it fights for recognition with issues of the environment, food safety, and even world food trade.[25] Second, advocates for individual and highly specific programs recognize the need to follow a counter approach. They play small ball, waiting for small issue openings in large bills—such as the recurring omnibus farm legislation—to achieve small wins that still matter to people who want their benefits. Issues get wrapped inside policy vehicles. This approach combines to give proposed RDAs and the Fund for Rural America relatively low political status—even at the outset of their development. Why? Someone will dismantle them, as quickly and quietly as possible. That's to be expected.

6. None of this means that the growing lobby of people who are angry with agricultural institutions will not have an impact on future policy. Some interests will. The highly political nature of the Agricultural Establishment makes institutional representatives responsive to criticism from all but the harshest reformers. Bureaucratic procedures also add to demands for an accountable review of public opinion. For agriculture, it's imperative to evaluate and investigate new ideas, new values, new worldwide circumstances,

new ideological beliefs, and the like. Neglecting this imperative costs institutionalists their own expert credibility and thus long-term public support.

7. An oddity of structure also affects the entire agricultural reform movement. With the reform movement's many core but quite small social-cause interest groups and with its reliance on generating national and international public and press support, many advocates of reform have had to become quite involved in Agricultural Establishment networking. The two-team analogy then breaks down rapidly. It's the league that matters: the agricultural policy domain. Issues of reform expertise are most likely to be considered in those domain networks; institutionalists want to review and evaluate the reformists and their work, and reformists are dependent for their success on the superior research capabilities and information-gathering abilities of the institutions. In that sense, an environmental policy activist lives in, at least, the old soil conservation network. She shares policy space there but contests dominant policy values. The domain, as a cooperative league, has come together in important if incomplete ways. At least the domain has come together in ways that foster discussion between networks and outsiders. That also describes the evolving Agricultural Establishment pretty well.