

(Mr. Carstenson's statement and statement of Tony T. Dechant, president of National Farmers Union follow:)

TESTIMONY OF NATIONAL FARMERS UNION, BLUE A. CARSTENSON, ASSISTANT
LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

The National Farmers Union has been more deeply involved in the War on Poverty than any other rural organization. It was our former President, James Patton, who led the delegation to President Johnson and urged him to declare that war which he did, right there and then.

The National Farmers Union and our state Farmers Union organizations have invested large amounts of time and money in the War on Poverty. We have lobbied and worked hard at the local, state and federal levels for all types of OEO programs. We have tried our "darndest" to help make this program effective in rural areas.

In four of our states, we have undertaken Neighborhood Youth Corps programs which have been well received, well run and are reaching young people from low income families who need the help, encouragement and income from this type of program. We have in-school Neighborhood Youth Corps programs in northern Wisconsin, and southern and central Indiana; and we have out-of-school and in-school Neighborhood Youth Corps programs in parts of Arkansas and Illinois except Cook County and several other urban areas in Illinois. These programs have been helping the young people from families who live in hardcore poverty.

In Illinois, our Neighborhood Youth Corps program is helping young people who have been referred to the program from the youth authority. We have had wonderful results in giving these young people, who have been in serious trouble, a second chance.

In Arkansas, which is our oldest Neighborhood Youth Corps program, we have already been able to see the results of our work with young people going on to college, business or vocational schools, jobs or into the armed forces. We have been devoting additional time and energy now to counseling and job placement.

One case in Arkansas, which just happened, gives an example of what impact this program can have. A young girl who came from a very poor family said she had felt that she wanted to drop out of school, although she had no plans on what to do. With counseling she was encouraged to reach for her dream. She is now enrolled in a Presbyterian Seminary with the aid of a part-time job, a loan which will enable her to work to become a Missionary and church worker.

These young people have worked hard, and we feel that because of the attitude of our staff and our farm organization about work, our young people have not been criticized for loafing on the job. They have helped schools, hospitals, local community agencies, local Government programs and projects. We have hundreds of local user agencies and schools and they are satisfied with our operation. While we have been harassed by some OEO officials who feel that local Community Action Agencies should have these programs, the Neighborhood Youth Corps program staff, Labor Department and local officials and Community Action Agency leaders have supported us all the way. We are proud of our record of our Neighborhood Youth Corps program.

The National Farmers Union has sponsored the National Green Thumb program which is operating in seven states—Arkansas, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia and Wisconsin. We are proud of our Green Thumb record and the complimentary things which members of Congress have said about Green Thumb.

President Lyndon B. Johnson said "Hundreds of older unemployed and retired farmers and rural workers have gained in income and in dignity, while contributing to the safety and beautification of state highways, schools, parks and rural towns through projects like Operation Green Thumb. They have assisted their disadvantaged neighbors to improve their homes and have added their skills to enhance neighboring communities.

"I have asked the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in cooperation with the Secretaries of Labor and Agriculture, to expand this activity and to develop new ways to provide meaningful public service opportunities for the elderly in rural areas."

Mrs. Lady Bird Johnson said "There are many older farmers who through no fault of their own have suffered adversity. Unfitted for other work, they face deprivation and poverty in their declining years. What an opportunity is presented here to provide them with useful employment for which they are fully qualified and, at the same time, to beautify our highways for the benefit of all our people."