

APPENDIX 8

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS: STAFF REPORTS

Farm Programs

The Cooperative Extension Service and the Farmers Home Administration, together with the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) and the Soil Conservation Service, are the major technical and financial assistance agencies of the Department of Agriculture. This briefing paper deals with the Cooperative Extension Service and the Farmers Home Administration. The Soil Conservation Service was not treated at the Montgomery hearing and the ASCS is the subject of a separate report by the Alabama State Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights, copies of which have been distributed.

The Extension Service and the Farmers Home Administration have been important in increasing the incomes and economic well-being of farmers throughout the nation. In Alabama and the Blackbelt they have been instrumental in assisting and financing the transition from cotton to other agricultural enterprises. Their services, however, have not benefitted the black poor of the 16 county hearing area.

The Commission on Civil Rights in 1965 studied the Extension Service and the Farmers Home Administration in its report, "Equal Opportunity in Farm Programs." The testimony at the hearing in Montgomery showed that the conditions described the 1965 report are substantially unchanged in 1968.

Cooperative Extension Service

The Commission investigated the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service to determine whether black farmers are receiving its benefits and whether the Service is effective in improving the farming practices and home life of black farmers and rural residents.

The Cooperative Extension Service, a joint Federal-State program of the Department of Agriculture, supplies current information about improvements in farming and homemaking practices to farmers and rural families, helping them identify their problems and assisting in devising solutions. At the Commission's hearing, testimony indicated that (1) the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service is not meeting the needs of black people—particularly those who are poor with only a few acres to farm; (2) the services it provides are racially segregated and unequal in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and (3) the Extension Service discriminates in employment against black people.

Failure of program to reach low-income people

The work of the Cooperative Extension Service is carried out by the State Extension Services of the land-grant colleges in each State through a system of more than 11,000 farm and home agents in almost every county of the United States. These agents, acting as joint representatives of the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges, work with local people on how to apply knowledge and information developed at the colleges to improve their farm, home, and community life. Linking the agents to the colleges are subject matter specialists who keep the agents informed of new agricultural advances and conduct demonstrations on how this knowledge should be applied.¹

¹ Extension work is financed from Federal, State, county, and local sources. Primarily the funds are used to employ the county agents and specialists who conduct the educational programs of the Extension Service. In fiscal year 1967, the breakdown of funds for Alabama was as follows: Federal: \$2,585,740 (41.4%); State: \$2,579,270 (42.0%); and County: \$1,035,694 (16.6%). Hearings of the Subcommittee on Agriculture of the House Committee on Appropriations "Department of Agriculture and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1968," 90th Cong., 1st Sess., PT II, p. 431.