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State of Vermont

AGENCY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Montpelier, Vermont 05602

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Department of Fish and Game
Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation
Department of Water Resources
Environmental Board
Division of Environmental Engineering
Division of Environmental Protection
Natural Resources Conservation Council

MEMORANDUM

TO: Martin L. Johnson, Secretary via
Arthur F. Heitmann, Executive Officer

FROM: Brendan J. Whittaker, Vice Chairman *B. J. W.*
Governor's Commission on Food

SUBJECT: Food Commission: Public Response

DATE: March 4, 1976

Now that the specific task of the Food Commission is completed, a final comment ought to be made on the public response we found during our deliberations over the past nine months. All of us on the Commission were deeply impressed with the outpouring of sentiment and feeling concerning food and farming which appeared at the hearings and in general conversations, as it became known that Vermont was the second state making an overall examination of these vital systems.

I saw this response coming from both sides of Vermont's current population, older natives and "new" Vermonters. For the native, "Vermont" is perceived as a rural, agrarian, land-oriented state. While others have pointed to a lack of "state-wide consciousness" in many areas (e.g., lack of a single dominant urban complex; no truly statewide news media; strong town consciousness with corresponding antipathy toward "Montpelier" - see Ecker-Racz School Funding Study 1973 -), the single, perhaps the only, statewide perception Vermonters do have is that of the land.

For the new wave of immigrants, there undoubtedly is a natural selection process at work in that the very issues covered by the Food Commission are many of same that a great number of new Vermonters considered in making their individual decisions to move here.

Martin L. Johnson via
Arthur F. Heitmann
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Whatever the reasons however, the fact that over 450 people would come out in busy times to visit and share ideas with a Governor's Commission about food and farming, and that many more would communicate with us by letter or telephone is indicative of a fundamental yearning for a sense of participation in the matters affecting their own lives. We found this everywhere we went and it continues. We are still receiving requests daily from all over the state from people interested in how the Commission recommendations will be implemented.

I am an absolute neophyte politically, but will state my belief on the basis of this Food Commission experience, that any politician who ignores this upwelling of feeling about food and land is living out of touch with the reality of what is occurring around us in Vermont. If the Legislators, for example, really believe that cutting taxes and slashing at government structure is the only concern of "the people", they are in grievous error, for that is almost totally a negative response, and far more positive action is wanted "back home".

In summary, what the Food Commission has tapped, in my opinion, is a very significant reservoir of people who, while realizing the stubborn problems Vermont faces, are ready and willing to cope. They feel the exhilaration of challenge. This group, which is found from one end of the state to the other, numbers in the many thousands. It longs for the moral and political leadership which will articulate the problems and provide the vision and direction necessary to take us into the 21st Century.

While naturally I am glad that the task is over for the Commission, I am grateful for the chance to have served and will miss these contacts. I'm left with a great sense of confidence that once again the people will carry on, if only we can find leaders courageous enough to follow them.

BJW:acb