

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Hollywood to the rescue?

"Country music" star Willie Nelson is staging a Farm Aid VI benefit as a cover for subversion in farm belt.

If you need something to cry into your beer about, feel bad that Hollywood still gets away with foisting the likes of Willie Nelson and his outfit, Farm Aid, as a friend of the farmer. Right from the start, Willie Nelson's I-feel-for-farmers pose was one of a number of Hollywood ploys intended to sow demoralization, and worse, in the farm belt. On April 24 in Ames, Iowa, Willie Nelson and fellow "country music" stars will stage a benefit concert ostensibly to raise money to help farmers. Called "Farm Aid VI," the program features names ranging from Ringo Starr to Tammy Wynette.

Regardless of how many do or don't attend the April 24 concert, and how much money is or isn't raised (the popularity of these bashes has fallen dramatically), the publicity stunt is intended to give an air of legitimacy to Farm Aid, which doles out money to a variety of subversive outfits in the farm belt. The theme of the Farm Aid-type activities is: Raise money for poor farmers, give them a hand-out, but *don't get involved in effective political action to change economic policy.*

Farm Aid was incorporated in 1985, and describes its purposes as being "to raise public awareness about the plight of the family farmer and to provide assistance to those families whose livelihood is dependent on agriculture." Willie Nelson is the figurehead. Farm Aid concerts were held in 1985 (Illinois), 1986 (Texas), 1987 (Nebraska), 1990 (Indiana), and 1992 (Texas).

According to its own reports, Farm Aid has given out about \$10.5 million since 1985. Only about \$2.5 million has been given in direct grants to farm-

ers for groceries, medical care, fuel, and other aid.

The bulk of the Farm Aid money has gone to a special network of programs located in rural areas that are part of a community control and dirty tricks operation directed by such agencies as the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL).

Recipient groups include Oklahoma Ag-Link Farm Crisis Hotline and the Farmers Legal Action Group (FLAG) of St. Paul, Minnesota. Grants range from \$20,000 to author Al Krebs for a book exposing corporate agriculture, to \$3,000 for a California Institute of Rural Studies project to help farmers switch to "organically grown" cotton, which is so in vogue among the Hollywood set. Farm Aid gave \$22,500 to the Nebraska Peace Foundation to pay for videotapes and pamphlets linking the existence of the farm crisis with the nuclear arms race.

All the grants have the common characteristic of encouraging farmers in protest and self-help activities that do not threaten the financial and political objectives of the food cartel companies, such as Cargill, ConAgra, ADM, Continental, and Louis Dreyfus, or the "Minneapolis mafia" organized crime and its front groups, such as the ADL.

Look at one recipient of Farm Aid funds, the group called PrairieFire Rural Action, which is based in Iowa. Started about a decade ago, PrairieFire has concentrated on keeping tabs in the farm belt of who was becoming too great a threat to the Minneapolis powers-that-be. Farm Aid has given a reported \$159,000 to PrairieFire.

The director of PrairieFire for the first few years of its operations was one Dan Levitas, an easterner whose father was involved in activities of the New York Council on Foreign Relations. When farmers in the mid-1980s began associating with Lyndon LaRouche's movement for economic change, running for office, and winning significant support, Levitas conducted all manner of dirty tricks operations against them. Levitas escalated his attacks after the 1986 Democratic Party primary in Illinois, when two LaRouche associates won the primary for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor and secretary of state.

Typical of a Levitas action was the leaflet he distributed in December 1988 in Chicago, denouncing "Lyndon LaRouche's Food for Peace Campaign" as "dangerous deception," from people he characterized as "far right," and organizations "that promote racism, anti-Semitism, and violence." The statement was signed by PrairieFire and others funded by Farm Aid, such as the Illinois South Project (\$173,000). A host of ADL co-groups signed the statement, including the New Jewish Agenda and the American Jewish Committee in Chicago, and the Center for Democratic Renewal (CDR) in Atlanta.

In the late 1980s, Levitas moved to Atlanta to head up the Atlanta CDR and concentrate on curbing the black civil rights movement, and left dirty tricks in the Midwest to others.

It is expected that, since the news broke on April 8 that the ADL is under investigation by the San Francisco District Attorney, in a case involving an international apparatus spying on thousands of Americans, the ADL-connected farm belt network will be a prime target for indictments. Willie may have to send his checks to some real farmers for a change.