DURING the early months of the New Deal in 1933, Texas cattlemen viewed with pride their refusal to bow to any form of government supervision. They regarded themselves as “self-reliant lovers of independence and elbowroom,” and as the last preserve of the old American virtues. In less than a year, however, this mood changed. Depression and drought swept the range, and cattle associations reluctantly joined other producers in applying for relief. But before suitable arrangements could be worked out, the government began emergency beef purchasing on a large scale, to reduce the number of cattle on the drought-swept ranges. A massive slaughter project followed. One Texan, upon reading reports that ranchers were co-operating with the relief program, lamented: “Standing ’em against the wall before the firing squad! That’s what drought relief is doing to the cows and calves.” Elsewhere in Texas, a rancher sold his stock and took his small son to see them destroyed. “Son,” he said indignantly, “you’ll never see such a thing again. No man has seen it before, and no man will see it again . . .” The purchase-slaughter program was only one part of federal involvement with the cattle industry during the Great Depression, but it was the most striking
and memorable aspect of what proved to be a short relationship between cattlemen and the government.¹

Unlike most of the agricultural producers in the nation, cattle raisers entered the Depression refusing to accept New Deal controls. They were particularly averse to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration [AAA], created in the late spring of 1933. Under the act which set it up, government officials took the position that farm problems were rooted in surplus production, and the agency offered cash inducements to producers of certain important commodities to check their output. By such a reduction, proponents of the AAA believed that the prices of basic commodities would rise, and the less important crops would also increase in price. Most of the agricultural groups — for example, the producers of wheat, cotton, corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, and milk — agreed to the program and saw their products appear on the basic commodity list, announced on May 12. Federal authorities also had wanted to include beef on the list, but cattle interests and their representatives in Congress blocked every move to place beef under AAA coverage.

During the debate over the commodity list, national spokesmen for the ranchers questioned the idea that surplus production was a problem, and declared that the processing and distribution program was the source of their concern. Consequently, the ranchers preferred to "go it alone," rather than submit to production control schemes or governmental supervision of their industry. At the same time, however, cattlemen watched in disgust, anger, and then dismay as other agricultural producers received money for submitting to AAA controls. Renewed drought and increased price troubles by early summer had cattlemen from Texas to North Dakota on bended knees begging the federal authorities to come to their aid.²

By mid-June, spokesmen for the Texas cattle industry were leading the way in the demand for AAA assistance to ranchers. Dolph Briscoe, president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers' Association, wrote Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, that his organization favored beef being placed on the commodity list. Briscoe admitted that

¹ San Angelo Morning Times (Texas), August 5, 1934.
² Lewis Nordyke, Great Roundup: The Story of Texas and Southwestern Cowmen (New York, 1955), 254.
his association, with other state and national groups, had earlier opposed the inclusion of beef, but he quickly added that the majority of the Texas ranchers were now ready to come under the AAA. The situation was so desperate, Briscoe said, that there was no time to call meetings or hold conferences. Someone with Wallace's "courage and foresight" must take steps to encourage the state and national cattle associations to join the Texans in saving the cattle industry.³

July heat and drought increased the stock raisers' desperation. One Texas rancher insisted that the government was discriminating against beef producers; the prices they paid for commodities had increased, while livestock was "getting cheaper every day." In another plea to Secretary Wallace, Briscoe re-emphasized his belief that federal action was imperative to keep the cattle industry alive. The ranchers' two most immediate grievances, he said, were drought and a feeling that New Deal recovery measures were indirectly harming them. When hundreds of Texans sent letters and telegrams of complaint to Washington, officials of the Department of Agriculture quietly reminded them that the cattle industry had voluntarily avoided the federal program. So long as the stockmen remained outside, the AAA could do little for them.⁴

In mid-August, partly on the suggestion of Secretary Wallace, the national leaders of the livestock industry met in Denver. There, after some discussion, they agreed unanimously to reconsider the question of beef being added to the commodity list. Their only qualification was that they be allowed to work out a marketing agreement with the packing industry, instead of accepting AAA controls. They appointed a Committee of Five to discuss this arrangement with the AAA and with the packers. The cattlemen favored the marketing approach for several reasons. In the first place, it would regulate the processing instead of the production end of their industry. It also fitted their argument that distribution, rather than excessive production, was the root of the beef problem. Secretary Wallace, however, disagreed with

⁴ Bose Reader to Wallace, July 14, 1933; Briscoe to Wallace, July 12, 1933; C. C. Davis to Thomas C. Poole, August 4, 1933, AAA–RASCS.
these conclusions, and argued that surplus beef was the cause for their difficulties. Upon his refusal to support the marketing agreement, the beef producers began to look for another way to secure assistance.5

When the AAA launched an Emergency Hog Purchase project in August, many cattlemen felt that a similar plan could be a solution for their problems. In this operation, the AAA began buying and killing pregnant sows and piglets. This not only removed these animals from the market, but also reduced future pork tonnage. Sows and larger pigs were slaughtered to provide food for people on relief. As word of this spread, ranchers began urging the government to initiate a similar program for them, or begin purchasing beef for relief purposes.

Texas cattlemen led the way in demanding immediate federal relief for their industry. They either were suffering more from drought and overproduction than ranchers in neighboring states, or were more willing to abandon the vaunted principles of self-reliance. Many approaches were suggested. One Texas rancher urged that the AAA begin buying the lower grade cattle for destitute families, which would give "great benefit to all concerned." Briscoe, like many others, favored a program similar to the hog plan. If cattle were made a basic commodity, a processing tax, similar to that being applied elsewhere in the AAA program, could be levied on slaughter houses to pay for the relief purchase. If the government accepted the plan, Briscoe said, he would see that the Committee of Five adopted it. AAA officials, however, refused to accept the plan. They apparently wanted beef declared a basic commodity and cattlemen to accept full government controls before they would act. Also, in spite of widespread agreement on the need for cash relief, some Western cattle interests still opposed the idea of a processing tax.8

The demand for a beef purchase program continued to grow. In September, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, a joint AAA and Federal Emergency Relief Administration project, to buy surplus farm products for people on relief rolls. The FSRC was empowered to purchase any surpluses, even those not

5"Report of the Committee of Five," ACP, XV (February 1934), 17.
6 Albert Campbell to The Producer, August 28, 1933, in ACP, XV (September 1933), 19. Briscoe to Victor Christgau, September 2, 1933, AAA-RASCS.
Dolph Briscoe, Sr., president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers' Association during the great drought of 1933–1935. — Author's files.

Jay Taylor, president of the Panhandle Livestock Association, was active in obtaining federal drought relief. — The Cattleman.
Abandoned homestead in Dallam County, in the Texas Panhandle. While this picture was taken in 1937, the accumulation of dirt and weeds indicates that drought conditions had persisted for several years. — U.S. Department of Agriculture.
on the basic commodity list. The new agency began purchasing beef in October, but was soon criticized for not buying in sufficient quantities to aid the cattle industry. Many Texans believed that most, if not all, the relief corporation’s funds should be used to buy beef.  

With criticism mounting, particularly in Texas, the FSRC decided to set up an experimental beef purchase-canning program in the state. In December of 1933 the government created the Texas Rehabilitation and Relief Commission, with Colonel Lawrence Westbrook as the director, and provided $500,000 to purchase live cattle for relief distribution. Westbrook announced that during the month of December the Commission would buy, kill, and can from 20,000 to 25,000 cows, and provide six million pounds or more of beef for needy families in Texas. He hoped that the project would not only aid the destitute, but also would bolster cattle prices. If the program succeeded in Texas, AAA authorities possibly would extend it to other states. Sending its agents into the state, the Commission bought approximately 21,000 cattle, distributed some of the animals as fresh beef, established nineteen canning plants, and gave employment to 7,000 people on relief rolls. The project was successful in helping meet immediate relief needs in Texas, and proved a valuable experience for government officials in the purchase and handling of cattle.  

The project was very popular with Texas ranchers. In January of 1934, W. P. H. McFaddin, the president of the Southeast Texas Livestock Association, praised the purchase-canning program, saying it was a tremendous success. It was a “sensible relief” operation, he declared, since it gave aid to three needy groups— the producers, the unemployed, and the hungry. Furthermore, the purchasing did not “destroy in order to give relief.” McFaddin urged that a similar plan be developed for the entire industry. So far cattlemen had not been “selfish enough to try to horn in and take the front of the stage” in the relief program, he said, but the time had come for the industry to receive

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7 Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, Incorporated, under the Laws of Delaware, Amended Certificate of Incorporation, AAA-RASCS.
assistance. McFaddin later proposed that at least four million cattle be removed through a more extended purchase-relief plan. Although the purchase-canning program proved successful in Texas, no federal funds were available to carry it beyond December. Texans and others immediately called for a revival of the experiment, but the government resumed its regular policy of buying small quantities of processed beef for relief use. These purchases were never large enough or at a sufficiently high price to affect the cattle market.9

Even before the experimental project in Texas was started, cattle producers in the Lone Star State were discussing ways of securing more substantial federal aid. Late in October of 1933, Jay Taylor, president of the Panhandle Livestock Association, warned Texas Congressman Marvin Jones that "something must be done and done immediately." Otherwise, the country would "certainly be faced with a revolution among the cattlemen. . . . If we are to stay in business and continue to live, . . . we must have immediate relief." The West Texan concluded with an expression of agrarian-ranching-fundamentalism: "Can't you do something to keep the industry that is the backbone of this country from going broke?" 10

In December five hundred cattlemen met in Canadian, Texas, to discuss federal help. Texas ranchers, they declared, were suffering more than "at any time during the current depression," and yet the government was doing very little for them. They proposed a federal purchase program to raise prices and stabilize the market. Similar demands were made at many other meetings held in West Texas that winter.11

The Panhandle Livestock Association now boldly insisted that cattlemen reconsider the question of the commodity list. In a public statement, the members asked that beef be made a basic commodity, and urged that seventy-five million dollars be spent in purchasing. Instead of accepting AAA controls, the Association suggested a spaying program for heifers in order to limit future production. The AAA officials stood firm, however. While sympathetic to the worsening conditions and the pleas for assistance, they simply reemphasized the

9W. P. H. McFaddin to Wallace, January 30, 1934; to Harry Petrie, February 9, 1934, AAA-RASCS.
10Jay Taylor to Marvin Jones, October 25, 1933, ibid.
11Dallas Morning News, December 12, 1933.
government position. As long as the stock raisers remained outside the AAA program, the Department of Agriculture could do little to relieve their plight.  

By January of 1934, three of the leading spokesmen of the Texas cattle industry were demanding that beef be made a basic commodity, or that a major beef purchase program be devised to aid the industry. These three men were Briscoe from the regional organization, Taylor of the Panhandle and West Texas area, and McFaddin, representing the Southeastern part of the state. But cattlemen elsewhere in the nation still were unwilling to surrender to the AAA. In January, a New York Times correspondent reported on the convention of the American National Livestock Association in Albuquerque, New Mexico. More than 1,500 members had assembled, but the organization could not agree on a course of action. Forty out of forty-five Texas delegates at the meeting voted to make beef a basic commodity, but the officers feared a divisive struggle over the issue, and refused to let the convention vote on joining the AAA. Instead, ranchers in each state were to decide for themselves about the commodity list. The convention authorized the Committee of Five to represent the Association in Washington, and to take “such other action as will . . . secure to the industry the relief desired.”

The Committee of Five agreed to support a bill that would place beef on the list and require “reasonable controls.” Pressure from federal officials, falling prices, drought conditions, and the lure of money-making programs prompted this decision. The cattlemen, however, insisted on two important provisions in any proposed legislation. First, they requested that at least two hundred million dollars be appropriated for the relief of the beef and dairy interests. Second, they asked that the government not require them to bear a processing tax. In early April of 1934, Representative Marvin Jones and Senator Tom Connally, both of Texas, pushed through Congress the Jones-Connally Act, which amended the original Agricultural Adjustment Act. The new law placed beef on the basic commodity list, and provided approximately two hundred million dollars to be used as benefit payments to ranchers who

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12 Grover B. Hill, “Report and History of Cattle Buying Drought Relief Program” (Texas), AAA—RASCS.
would reduce their production. This sum would be repaid through a processing tax. The measure also included fifty million dollars, not subject to repayment, which could be used to eliminate diseased cattle and purchase beef for relief use.\textsuperscript{14}

Beef cattle were now under the AAA, but cattlemen and government planners immediately disagreed over the nature of the relief program to follow. AAA leaders emphasized the need for a permanent control plan, rather than a major cash relief measure. Any purchase-reduction project, they insisted, would offer only temporary relief. To provide lasting benefits it had to be linked with long-term production controls. The Committee of Five had agreed to consider a "reasonable" plan, but their constituents now clamoured for immediate financial relief rather than regulations for adjusting output. Obviously, control of production would lead to a degree of federal supervision. While some cattlemen were horrified by the idea of government interference, others were ready to accept the cash first and argue over "reasonable controls" later. An out-of-state observer took a somewhat humorous view of the situation. He urged the government to avoid the "piggy sow" method of relief-curtailment, since it caused the destruction of food. Instead, he proposed that ranchers continue to "allow the bulls and cows [to] run together, but [to] put roller skates on the hind feet of all the bulls" so that breeding would be made more difficult.\textsuperscript{15}

In May of 1934, when government planners and cattlemen were about to complete a reduction-control arrangement, the most disastrous drought in American history struck the cattle country. All planning was now postponed. Water, feed, and grass became scarce or nonexistent over much of the Trans-Mississippi West. Minnesota, the Dakotas, and then the Texas Panhandle were designated to receive emergency assistance. A massive purchase program, designed to reduce cattle numbers to fit the available feed supply, was the heart of the emergency project. Ultimately, relief aid to the ranchers included feed assistance, lower shipping rates, and transportation to grass in other states and the shelter-belt in the Plains area. Funds also were poured into canning plants to preserve the non-diseased beef, and various work projects for farmers

\textsuperscript{14}ACP, XV (February 1934), 38; ibid., XV (April 1934), 7.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., XV (April 1934), 7. Rollin B. Organ to Wallace, April 27, 1934, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture [ROSA], RG 16.
were started. It was, however, the purchase of drought cattle which brought immediate help and attracted most of the attention, criticism, and applause. When criticized, government officials cited the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation experiment the previous winter in Texas as a precedent for the project.10

At first, AAA officials hoped that the disaster aid could be made the first step in forcing the cattlemen to accept a controls program. However, as government purchases increased and it was rumored that beef scarcity was in the offing, the AAA pushed ahead with the emergency program, and dropped the idea of tying it to a control plan. The procedure for the purchase and disposal of cattle under the drought emergency program was comparatively simple. AAA officials, together with Bureau of Animal Industry inspectors, bought the animals on the farm or at a convenient gathering place. The seller signed a contract with a pledge that he would cooperate in a control program that would be worked out in the future. In return he received a purchase payment and a benefit payment. The first check was for buying the cow, and was subject to claims by lien holders. The benefit represented the AAA payment for the pledge to join in a future control program, and was reserved from lien claims. The maximum total payment was twenty dollars per cow, while in Texas the average paid was about twelve and one-half dollars. The price was only slightly above the market value, but the government bought many cattle which were too weak to survive shipment to market. After purchase, the AAA donated the edible animals to the FSRC for relief distribution. Diseased cattle or those judged unfit for food were condemned and destroyed on the range.17

The problem of disposal became more complicated as government operations expanded. In June the AAA had planned to buy approximately 50,000 cattle per week, but by August it was purchasing nearly 600,000 weekly, and maintained this level for five weeks. Across the nation, the government bought 8,300,000 cattle; in Texas alone, pur-


17 “The Drought of 1934–35,” 68, 185, AAA–RASCS.
chases reached 2,015,621. Of the national total, about eighteen percent were condemned; in Texas some thirty-four percent were declared unfit for food.

The destruction of meat, at a time when many Americans were starving, became a national issue. Protests against food waste and warnings of divine retaliation were widespread. One Texan solemnly warned that the drought had been sent because Americans were too worldly and God was “tired” of their ways. “If we were not disobedient children,” he declared, “we would not . . . be killing our livestock for want of feedstuff to feed them. We cannot legislate to prosperity. God will send rain and prosperity when we get ourselves in line for it.” At Marlin, Texas, a man protested a supposed government order that the condemned animals could no longer be saved for relief use, but must be “burned or otherwise made unfit for human consumption.” In August, the Tom Green County Democratic Convention pronounced on the issue. By a unanimous vote this body resolved that it was “absolutely criminal madness to destroy good food . . . when our millions are in real want as they now are.” Charles Metcalfe, the delegate who proposed the resolution, argued that no producer wanted the price of his products “raised at the cost of human lives.” The government “should allow the farmers to give this meat to the needy,” he said.

Government officials denied that orders had been given prohibiting the use of good meat for relief. Ranchers defended the destruction as necessary to the survival of their industry. They argued that most of the condemned cattle “would have starved to death during the coming winter anyway,” and reasoned that “it was more humane to kill these animals and prevent so much suffering.” Besides, it was better to get a little money from the government, than to knock the cattle in the head next winter and get nothing.

Much misunderstanding existed regarding the government condemnation and enforcement procedures, which varied from place to place. As a rule, the officials, on inspecting the mature cattle, condemned

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19 San Angelo Morning Times, August 5, 7, 13, 1934; Frank Reeves, “Gossip from the Range and Feet Lot,” The Cattleman, XXII (December 1934), 18. Robert H. Curnutte to Tom Connally, August 9, 1934, AAA–RASCS; Frank Reeves, “Biggest Cattle Deal of all Time; What has Nature and Man Forced the Government to do for the Cattle Raisers?” The Cattleman, XXII (October 1934), 9–15.
Cattle killed by drought in the mid-1930s. Drought relief cattle in the Kansas City, Kansas, stockyards in 1934. — U.S. Department of Agriculture.
only the diseased and severely emaciated. In many areas, they allowed the owners and relief workers to save the meat from all but the sickly cattle. In other places, the needy were permitted to salvage enough for their families. Apparently there were violations of the procedure. For example, in Tom Green County, Dr. L. R. Noyes, supervising veterinarian for the Bureau of Animal Industry in that purchase area, charged that at least one hundred and fifty people followed the inspectors from one site to another “just to get the condemned stock.” Noyes insisted that these cattle were not fit to eat. “They would not be accepted,” he declared, “by a government inspector at any packing house in the United States — and no physician or veterinarian would knowingly allow them to be consumed as food . . .”

The beef canning program was an impressive example of the government’s attempt to reduce waste. Texas operated twenty-two plants, most of which had been built during the earlier FSRC canning project. Altogether, the Texans preserved fifty million cans of meat, employed 30,000 men and women from the relief rolls, and handled 432,588 cattle. Not even this achievement prevented criticism, however, and the tradition of fantastic waste continued. In such a massive project, it was inevitable that errors in classification and variations in enforcing rules would occur, but they seemed to be minimal. Most of the cattle were in such a weakened condition that they would have brought little or nothing on the regular market, and few would have survived shipment to the stockyards.

Far more important to cattlemen than the condemnation issue was the possibility of government control. For a variety of reasons, partly financial and partly to ensure cooperation in a future control program, the AAA purchase contract required the seller to pledge participation in a subsequent control plan. Anticipating a government move to force them to honor their pledges, Texas ranchers raised an outcry. Charges of an un-American government take-over and even Fascism were voiced. Outraged stockmen insisted that they were being bribed to turn a blind eye, and to give up independence and self-reliance in exchange for governmental security. In an article for the Saturday Evening Post, J. Evetts Haley, a prominent West Texas author and rancher, labeled

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20 *San Angelo Morning Times*, July 21, August 2, 1934.
the drought project a diabolical plot to capture control of the cattle industry. The stock raisers, he warned, had surrendered their birthright "for a herd of canner cows." Even supporters of the program admitted that many cattlemen were fearful that the government might take "our liberties away," or expressed a belief "that this or that was unconstitutional." It also was reported that several ranchers had even refused to sell to the government, while others were shipping their cattle to Mexico. 22

Texas cattlemen expressed their attitude toward the government through their response to purchase offers; their reaction to efforts to limit buying; and their reception of plans for controlling production. Regarding purchasing, some cattlemen on the grounds of principle refused to sell to the government, while others refused out of expectation that federal purchases would continue indefinitely — or at least would raise beef prices. Although the producers in twenty-four Texas counties would not participate in the drought program, well over 110,000 sold cattle to the AAA between June of 1934 and the end of buying in January of 1935. The proportion of cattle raisers who took part in the program suggested that many were eager to cooperate, and held no dread of federal control. 23

Most Texans were well pleased with the drought relief program. A correspondent in The Cattlemen, the journal of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers' Association, asserted that ranchers were "smiling for the first time in years," while Dolph Briscoe described the federal program as the "greatest thing for the cattlemen this country has ever known." Without AAA purchases, he said, cattle would have been dumped on the market and "would not be worth 'two-bits' a dozen." As Briscoe and others recognized, the timing of the federal aid was vital. Without the purchases, some stockmen insisted, many "would never have survived the drouth." Others pointed to numerous specific benefits of the federal aid. The purchases not only resolved the overstocking

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22 J. Evetts Haley, "Cow Business and Money Business," Saturday Evening Post, CCVII (December 8, 1934), 96; Reeves, "Biggest Cattle Deal," The Cattlemen, XXII (October 1934), 13; San Angelo Morning Times, December 21, 1934. Nordyke, Great Roundup, 256.

problem, but also enabled the rancher to make the most through culling of his herd in history.24

The ranchers who seized this opportunity to rid their herds of diseased and poor quality stock expressed a certain arrogance. In several South Texas counties, ranchers sold more cattle than the 1930 census had enumerated there. They then went north to stock farms in Texas, Oklahoma and the Plains, bought quality animals, and rebuilt their herds. It was a matter of simply making the best of a bad situation, but the air of confidence suggested more. In response to depression and drought, government assistance not only prevented a total disaster but opened the way, if the rains came, for a major improvement in the livestock industry.25

In September of 1934, when the government announced it was ending the purchase program, cattlemen made it clear that they wanted the aid to continue. AAA officials imposed a quota on buying in September, and sought to end it in October. The cattlemen protested violently, insisting that such a course would destroy the industry. The government had promised that purchases would continue indefinitely. Most cattle were not worth the high cost of feed, and millions would die during the winter. Individuals, livestock organizations, publishers, and congressmen all joined in the demand that relief aid continue. Even Harry Petrie, head of the livestock division of the AAA and field supervisor of the drought program, sided with the cattlemen. He had promised that the government would keep buying cattle “until the drought ends.” Larger ranchers, who claimed that they had sold fewer cattle so that the smaller producers would benefit, declared they would be wiped out if the program ended.26

In late September and early October, hundreds of Texans wired their congressmen, the AAA, and President Roosevelt that dire effects would follow if the drought project were terminated. In a typical commentary, the editor of the Amarillo Globe praised the purchases, but

24 San Angelo Morning Times, February 13, 1935; Amarillo Globe (Texas), July 1934–March 1935.


26 San Angelo Morning Times, July 21, 1934. Harry Petrie, Reasons for Purchasing more Cattle under the Emergency Cattle Program, November 8, 1934, AAA–RASCS.
warned that all “will have been in vain” if the government should stop its relief aid. Further reduction in cattle numbers would be a “boon to the industry,” but the “loss of those cattle must be borne by the government — it would be fatal to their present owners.” On September 28 county judges and commissioners from one hundred and twenty West Texas counties met in Plainview, gave unanimous support to the cattle-men, and urged the President to continue the program.27

The strongest pressure came from the larger producers. At a meeting at Amarillo on September 27—28, cattlemen from New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle took a firm stand. Grover B. Hill, supervisor of AAA cattle purchasing for the region, and an officer of the Panhandle Livestock Association, declared to those assembled that the industry had “benefited little from the buying program to date,” because the men with the large herds had “stepped aside and let the men with the small herds sell their cattle.” Government aid had “been cut off even before those hit the hardest had their cattle bought.” Jay Taylor, president of the Panhandle Association, warned that the ranchers in the “principal cattle raising belt” would be ruined unless government buying continued. “We plan to tell A. A. A. officials,” Taylor declared, “that it is our opinion that it will be more economical to kill the cattle and can them for relief agencies, than it will be to let 3,000,000 head freeze and starve to death. Persons on the relief rolls need the meat; and we need to cull our herds if the ranching business is to continue to exist.”28

Accordingly, Taylor and Hill lead a delegation to Washington in October. They enlisted the aid of Congressman Marvin Jones, Chairman of the Housing Agriculture Committee, and talked to AAA officials. When told that federal funds for cattle buying were almost exhausted, Jones insisted that money could be found and threatened to place the issue before the President. The Texans turned next to Secretary of Agriculture Wallace, who was in Chicago. Wallace expressed understanding of the situation and agreed that it would “be better to

27 Amarillo Globe, September 28–30, 1934; San Angelo Morning Times, September 29–30, 1934.

28 Amarillo Globe, September 28, 30, October 1–5, 1934; San Angelo Morning Times, September 30, October 1–5, 1934.
buy these cattle than let them die on the range." But he also warned that money was very limited.29

Although the AAA continued to talk of ending the aid program, the government kept on buying cattle. On at least two occasions the AAA set tentative cut-off dates, only to back down and extend purchasing. Rumors of meat shortages and the possible depletion of foundation herds apparently caused concern in Washington. Though these fears were greatly exaggerated, the criticism generated by earlier emergency projects and the so-called "policy of scarcity" made even courageous political leaders cautious. In mid-November Secretary Wallace informed Texas Congressman R. M. Kleberg that the state already had received more than its share of relief funds, and that no more money was available to buy cattle there. Nevertheless, the AAA continued to purchase in major sections of the state through January of 1935.30

In various parts of Texas, stockmen had carefully refrained from reducing their herds below the danger level. During the extended buying period, they sold far fewer cattle than they had insisted were necessary for their survival. There were several reasons for their action. Many ranchers simply wanted the program to continue as a safety valve. If it did not rain, they would sell; if it rained, they would keep their stock. In November and December the rains came. The weather was mild, and cattlemen kept their stock. A slight but hopeful improvement in the market price brought additional encouragement. Government buyers even reported that independent brokers frequently outbid them for drought cattle.31

By early 1935, West Texans were expressing a new optimism. In his report to Washington, AAA Supervisor Grover Hill observed that the drought program had the "almost universal approval and endorsement of the actual producers of cattle." Livestock associations, citizens'
groups, and individuals endorsed Hill’s statement. “Happy days are coming back to the West,” the farm editor of the Amarillo Globe proclaimed on January 20. Elsewhere in the state a federal official declared that Texas farmers and stockmen were “in better spirits now than they were a year ago, notwithstanding the drought.” Cattle-drought committees from a number of counties telegraphed to Washington expressing appreciation for government aid.32

Amidst the praise, however, numerous groups in Texas petitioned the government for more assistance. They not only wanted lenient credit facilities, but also an embargo on all imported beef — measures which had been discussed for a number of years. Some stockmen declared that existing high prices must continue for them to “make a comeback,” but carefully avoided suggesting that the government institute beef controls to maintain price levels.33

In February of 1935, when the AAA proposed a feed-grain reduction plan to control pork and beef production, Texas ranchers voiced a protest. They insisted that beef should not be linked to pork, for there was no longer a beef surplus. Moreover, pork producers had created their own problems, and should finance the solutions to them. Representatives of the cattle industry met with Secretary Wallace on February 28 and discussed the recommended controls. They were unanimously opposed to the grain reduction plan and to a processing tax on beef to finance it. Grover Hill, who attended as one of the more important representatives, reiterated that cattlemen favored marketing agreements rather than direct controls, and argued that the government should not lower the tariff duties on meat.

The issue was joined in early March when Congressman Jones arose in the House of Representatives and warned that the projected grain control program would break faith with the cattlemen. He reminded his colleagues that assurances had been given from “the floor of the House that there would be no processing tax on cattle without the approval of the industry.” Several weeks later the Southwestern Cattle


33 San Angelo Morning Times, January 24, March 1, 1935; Hill, “The Cattle Buying Drouth Program in Texas,” AAA-RASCS.
Raisers' Association met in convention, and echoed Jones' sentiment. In a public statement the members strongly opposed a processing tax on beef as a part of any control plan. Many ranchers seemed to feel, one speaker said, that the program would place "a levy on cattle to help corn and hog growers of the Midwest." 34

Faced with vigorous opposition, the AAA did not push the grain reduction program. In November of 1935 it reluctantly announced that cattlemen would not be included in its production control plans. Gerald B. Thorne, director of the AAA Livestock Division, questioned the practicality of instituting a cattle curtailment scheme. A number of ranchers, he observed, "in some major producing regions are opposed to undertaking a program of this kind and would not provide sufficient participation to insure its success." Although the cattlemen who had profited from drought aid had pledged they would cooperate in a future adjustment program, the Administration was unwilling to try to force compliance with that agreement. Texas cattlemen had wanted relief assistance, but no production controls. Many continued to request federal aid, but they were only interested in projects which carried no duties or regulations.35

In the following months, Texas cattlemen continued to protest against imported beef and request easier credit. In order to meet continued drought problems, the government in 1936 did sponsor one small, unpublicized beef purchase arrangement. However, most of the projects in the cattle country generally were part of long-range, diversified programs involving conservation and shelterbelt plans. There was little significant change in the cattle country, because beef prices remained fairly high down to the outbreak of World War II. This discouraged any desire for change.36

In the early days of the New Deal, Texas cattlemen by choice had remained outside the government program for agricultural recovery.

34 San Angelo Morning Times, March 1, 7, 13–15, 1935.
35 Memorandum for Mastin B. White, November 9, 1935, AAA-RASCS.
36 Paul Appleby to Calvin B. Hoover, July 18, 1936; Cattle Purchase Committee, Memorandum for J. W. Tapp, November 27, 1936, ROSA. Theodore Saloutos, "The New Deal and Farm Policy in the Great Plains," AgH, XLVII (July 1969), 345–55, describes many of the efforts to help a major cattle area.
But as others profited from cash-producing arrangements and a devastating drought threatened to wipe out their industry, cattle raisers reversed their stand and sought aid from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. But before a suitable plan could be drafted, the drought worsened, and the AAA began massive emergency beef purchasing to reduce the cattle population. The relief program did not last, however. After buying some eight million head — over two million of them in Texas — the government ended the emergency program. When cattlemen protested, AAA officials urged them to consider joining the controls program, which they refused to do. As rising cattle prices brightened the economic scene, the discussion of relief ended. Independence, political maneuvering — and fate — helped Texas cattlemen endure the dark days of the early 1930s and emerge untainted by the requirements of government controls.