

Oral History Interview

with

ALBERT H. MOSEMAN

Official, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1936-1956.

Conducted by

Raymond H. Geselbracht and Randy Sowell, Harry S. Truman Library

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[1]

GESELBRACHT: This is Ray Geselbracht and it is June 14, 2004. I am with Randy Sowell and we are going to interview Mr. Albert Moseman who donated his papers to the Library recently. Dr. Moseman, could you please tell us how your career got started and what it was that brought you into Mr. Truman's administration?

MOSEMAN: Well, I was born and raised in Nebraska on a farm, and I got involved in a lot of the technical aspects of farming. My father was very progressive. He supported the 4H Clubs, and he encouraged his five sons to be active in the Baby Beef Clubs and to have other projects related to livestock—pigs, sheep and dairy animals. I was able to participate in these at a time when in the Midwest we had scholarships and fellowships that were given to farm boys and girls by the J. C. Penny Company, Sears, and Union Pacific, and so that was an incentive for us to be involved in the young people's activities and 4H Clubs.

I went to the University of Nebraska in 1934, and I earned there a bachelor's degree in agronomy and a master's degree also in agronomy. During the years 1936 to 1940, I worked on a wheat improvement program for the Great Plains—the states from Texas into the Canadian Provinces. We were involved in improving wheat and small grains in this area. During the time I was in the wheat program, the supervisor asked if I would be interested in carrying on at Lincoln in the cooperative program with the University of Nebraska for my Master's Degree. And that program was supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the experiment stations in the Midwest. The work in the Great Plains region was interesting and I became rather curious as to what made that work so well with the federal agency and the participating experiment stations, and also I became interested in how agricultural programs of a regional nature, and then finally an international nature, were organized and operated.

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When I finished my Ph.D. degree at the University of Minnesota in 1944, I was offered the position of the assistant to the chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils and

Agricultural Engineering. This was referred to as “The Bureau” since it had a name that was so long. But it happened to have such a long name because the Bureau of Plant Industry, which was formed in 1903, was one of the better organized and operated research organizations in the Department of Agriculture. When the country became concerned about the pending war in 1939, the decision was made to provide more leadership for the military, for the War Department, and so the Department of Agriculture’s experiment stations at Arlington Farm were moved to a horticulture station out at Beltsville, Maryland, and the Bureau of Plant Industry had added to it the functions of soil research and research in agricultural engineering, and it became one of the largest research bureaus in government. I was brought into the headquarters at Beltsville to be involved with program planning and coordination.

During that time, I met Charles Brannan. Truman’s campaign for election in 1948 focused on the overabundance of crops and livestock products. And so we were concerned with the disposing of surpluses.

GESELBRACHT: What year are you speaking of here?

MOSEMAN: This was 1945, in that era. We had visitors at Beltsville from a number of foreign countries including Italy, where the Food and Agriculture Organization was just being established. Charles Brannan gave a talk on what we were doing to dispose of excess butter and food grains. And as we left the auditorium where Brannan spoke that day, why one of our friends from overseas said, “You people in the U.S. have a problem, but it is a beautiful problem.” But to Charlie Brannan it was not so beautiful, nor was it a beautiful problem in Mr. Truman’s opinion. They were tackling it by setting a two-price season, a scale that there were certain products that would be sold at a discount so that they could be removed from surplus stocks. And so that’s how the Brannan Plan came into being. I had the pleasure of Mr. Brannan appointing me to the position of the chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry in 1951.

When World War II came along, the Department of Agriculture had quite a number of changes. Dr. Robert M. Salter, who had been Chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry, was moved over to head the Soil Conservation Service, and I was soon after named Chief of the Bureau of Tree Replacement.

GESELBRACHT: When Truman became President in April 1945 were you already working at the Department of Agriculture?

MOSEMAN: Yes I was. In 1945 I was in the Bureau of Plant Industry as an assistant to the chief of the bureau to handle the work on the coordination and program planning in that organization. And like many others in 1945, I was inherited by President Truman. [3]

When we began to be concerned about the postwar period, with what was called the Marshall Plan and the Point Four program, I was very much involved with both of these. And so we were really involved with the recovery, the rebuilding not only of the

European Countries, but also through the Point Four program into the Asian countries of the Far East.

GESELBRACHT: Were you personally involved in both those programs at different times?

MOSEMAN: Yes. In the case of the Marshall Plan, George Marshall was one of several people who were contributing to planning this kind of assistance to European countries. I think there were about three, four, or perhaps more people involved too, but Marshall was the one who put all the ideas together, so his name was on it. President Truman said the Marshall Plan succeeded because there was no jealousy among the people who contributed ideas. Marshall was recognized as the person who put it all together.

GESELBRACHT: Could you describe your involvement?

MOSEMAN: At that time I was still in the Department of Agriculture, working on research in soils, crops, engineering and so forth. We furnished people to the Marshall Plan and then also to the Point Four program.

What some people do not realize is that in addition to the Marshall Plan there was a separate group that was giving attention to the European countries, and this was headed by the European nations themselves, through the Office of Economic Cooperation and Development. I was involved in that.

In fact, in April of 1967 I attended a meeting of the OECD in Paris, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Marshall Plan, to discuss what could be done to help the European countries.

And so, I was involved in the European nations own program. Most people don't know that that was going on—that we were working with European countries through the OECD as well as through the Marshall Plan.

GESELBRACHT: Could you describe how you got involved in the Point Four program?

MOSEMAN: I became involved in the Point Four program in 1950.

SOWELL: The Office of Economic Cooperation and Development, the OECD was a product of the Marshall Plan among the European countries and it continued, as you point out, into the 1960's. At that time, were you involved in assisting the European countries to improve their own food production? Also, was the United States trying to introduce [4]

new methods of cultural development, based on American culture, to these countries? Or was it more a matter of repairing damage, or trying to address the effects, the physical effects of the war, or was it both?

MOSEMAN: You see, the development of the high yielding rices and wheats occurred during this period. So the European countries were interested in incorporating these new crops into their agriculture. They invited several of us who were involved with the so-called Green Revolution—with developing high yielding rice in the Philippines and high yielding wheats in Mexico, Latin America, South Asia—to this OECD meeting in 1967. And it happened that they asked me to be the chairman of the meeting, which was awkward because we were talking to European countries that had many years of experience with such similar gatherings. They had had one for rice and one that worked on corn and wheat. And they asked me to chair that meeting because our Green Revolution work was the most recent, spectacular thing, and I was supposed to know what to do.

At this first meeting, in early April 1967, we reviewed what might be considered, and I was asked to draw up a blue print, essentially identify where we should have another research institute on livestock, on different crops—to case the world to see where you should put these types of institutions. And we agreed we would have a meeting in October 1967 to give serious considerations to this new type of institution. I found that I was not in sympathy with the idea of a single American vote which determined that this was the way the world ought to be shaped up with high technology and all these different components of agriculture.

So, I prepared a report—it's in my papers—that indicated the *kinds* of things that should be done, but not where they should be done. Because I figured if we laid out the kinds of things that should be done, and if the European Countries agreed that these were good things to do, they would decide where to do them. That would leave it to the European nations to decide what to do. They had some second thoughts, though, and they didn't really come forward with options. I think that was right because the United States should not be in the position of telling the European powers where to go.

GESELBRACHT: Just to clarify, you were not in sympathy with the idea that an American would be telling these other countries what to do?

MOSEMAN: I thought that if the idea was good, that this could be done here and so on, then somebody in the European community of nations could say "We would like to do this."

GESELBRACHT: You were telling me earlier that you were selected to go on a world-wide mission which, as I understood it, was the first step in the Point Four program. Could you describe that mission?

[5]

MOSEMAN: 1950 is when we had the first tour around the world to discuss President Truman's Point Four program. Representatives of the countries we were to visit said, "Well, this is another American proposal--all talk, no action." And so their response was

cool. The State Department decided it would send a three person team to discuss the Point Four concept to different countries and they picked the countries they felt were probably most in need of food and other agricultural upgrading. The team had its start in Rome to see what the Food and Agriculture Organization was beginning to do. We stopped also in Lisbon to see what the Marshall Plan people were starting to do.

GESELBRACHT: And you were one of those three people?

MOSEMAN: Yes.

GESELBRACHT: And who were the other two?

MOSEMAN: I was representing research technology. One of the other people was in the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations. That was a program that had been developed by the U.S. in the Latin American countries. The third person was in charge of agricultural extension. So, we had research, we had extension and then we had a person who was already involved in this type of program in Latin America.

We were briefed by the State Department about the different countries that we were to visit. We started our visits in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and India. When we got to Pakistan, we had a team of a Public Health Service person and a State Department person, and they said, "Stop talking about Point Four." And we said, "Well, what are we supposed to talk about?" They said, "Well, the Congress is not going to support the Point Four program." I don't know whether you've got that in your records at the Truman Library, but that was what we were told. And so I said, "Well, do you want us to go back home." "No," they said, "just stop talking about Point Four." And I said, "Well, that's silly." And we kept talking about Point Four.

As a result I spent about three weeks in India. We would tell the folks who were arranging our programming, "We'll stay a few more days in India." As a result, I got to know India about as well as anybody, and I got to know the technical people. So, when it came to working in India later on, I was a friend of India. That's getting ahead of my story, but that's how I got into the saddle.

But the program was not free from threats. When we got to Nagaland in India, there was a riot there because the U.S. was sending potatoes to India. They were short of food, but the local people said, "We are rice eaters, we cannot take potatoes." And apparently there is some physiological truth to this and they don't have the capacity to digest potatoes. Nobody got hurt, but this was a real problem for our program in India. Another problem arose in the Philippines. When we got there we were told, "Don't stay out after [6]

dark," because of the Huks—the Huk ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon was the name of the communist group there—and we had to cut our trip short. Also, the Philippines wanted to have a cash support payment instead of technology, and we encountered that problem in a number of other places.

But one thing that happened in all of these operations is that people remembered the Marshall Plan, which only lasted a few years, and did not recognize that the Point Four program was more widely established than the Marshall Plan and really did much more good for these countries than a Marshall Plan type program could have done. The Marshall Plan, as far as agriculture was concerned, did bring hybrid corn to Europe, but not many other agricultural innovations would transfer so easily. So it's interesting that the Marshall Plan is so readily recognized as being successful. The Point Four program produced a much greater variety of benefits.

The papers I donated to the Truman Library include pictures of Frank Parker, who worked in the U.S. aid program in very early days, and continued in this work for a long, long time. The papers also include pictures of Philip Trezise, an American aid official who worked with the Europeans.

GESELBRACHT: How long did you work with the Point Four program?

MOSEMAN: Only for about 90 days in 1950. We left on the 28th of January and we got back to the United States on the 27th of April. Then I went back to the Bureau of Plant Industry and to working with the Indians—well, actually with Frank Parker and others who had been with the aid program for some time and were working in India. The Indians asked the Rockefeller Foundation to take a look at India, and Frank Parker promoted their request. The Rockefeller Foundation did become involved in India, and Frank Parker, who had formerly been with the Bureau of Plant Industry, asked if I would become involved in a review of India. So we formed a joint Indo-American team—three Americans and five Indians. The three Americans were Dean Buchanan of the agriculture school at Iowa State University, Dean Leisure of the Veterinary School at Kansas State University, and me. I was with the Department of Agriculture at that time. So, with our five Indian counterparts, we comprised a team of eight. The Indian members included people from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. One of India's states, Bengal, was represented by its Director of Agriculture. We also had the Indian in charge of the Indian Veterinary Research Institute and two people who served as guides and planned the contacts we would make in India. This program went from July 15 through the end of September, 1955.

This was a follow-up to the tour in India I had made in 1950, and I was involved in the work in India in 1955 because of this earlier experience. I mention this because when we tried to hire somebody to be the field director of the Rockefeller Foundation team, we would send the candidates over to India to look over the situation. One of the candidates, a university president, went over and came back and said he wouldn't take the job. He [7]

was a good friend of J. George Harrar, head of the agriculture department at the Rockefeller Foundation. He said to Harrar, "I will not go to India, George, and I don't think the Rockefeller Foundation should go to India. You cannot work with the Indians." I mention this because I was in the room at the time this chap made that comment to

Harrar, who was my boss by this time. Harrar asked me, "What do you think?" And I said, "We can make it work." And it did work out all right.

My papers include a statement by Indira Gandhi, made in 1976. She was talking about her vision of America. She said, "America has many things going for it, including its agricultural technology." As I was going to India in 1955, Indira Gandhi was on the flight from Bombay to Delhi and we recognized each other and she said to me, "Are you coming to India as a tourist?" And I said, "No, I am going to work with some of your Indian agriculture people." And she said, "Thank you. We need you." This is really just an incidental story, but it shows the attitudinal change in the Indians. My papers show that India benefited from what we did in the Point Four program.

SOWELL: Did you often work directly with Secretary Charles Brannan?

MOSEMAN: He was of course overall secretary and there were not many occasions when I worked with him very closely. I'm not sure whether you know this, but after the Brannan Plan had been talked over for some time and the concern about the two price system developed, the Brannan Plan became a kind of bad word, a tarnished situation. One contact I had with Charlie Brannan was when he appointed me chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry. I was in his office. He was sitting at his desk with no jacket on. He came over and picked up his jacket off the coat rack and said the place looked like an old haberdashery store. (Laughter.) So anyway, that was Charlie Brannan. I did meet with him weekly when he chaired a meeting of people representing all the agencies in the Department of Agriculture. At the last meeting of this group, Charlie Brannan said he was sorry it was his last meeting with us. He said, "I am sure my successor, Ezra Taft Benson, will carry on these meetings. I don't see how he could work without them." We never had them.

That's the way Charlie Brannan operated. About six months or so after the new administration came in, Charlie Brannan was waiting in a long line for a flight to Colorado, and he was about half way through the line and no one was talking with him. He was just an isolated person there. So I walked up and introduced myself, and he was glad to see me. He said, "People don't come around to see me much anymore." He was a wonderful person, and he did a lot when he was Secretary of Agriculture.

GESELBRACHT: If I remember correctly, in 1956 you started work with the Rockefeller Foundation.

MOSEMAN: Yes.
[8]

GESELBRACHT: Could you describe the work you did with the foundation?

MOSEMAN: Well, I started out really to help develop the program in India. I did not go to India because I had young children, and my wife and I did not want to move there. So

I agreed to join the foundation and do the planning of how the program should work, and to hire people for the program. I also took two trips a year to India.

Dean Rusk, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, was very much involved. Having been in the State Department, he had a feel for international affairs. When the Rockefeller Foundation had its 50th anniversary in 1963, John D. Rockefeller, III said he thought the foundation should be more adventuresome, take more risks. Dean Rusk was right on that same wavelength back in the 1950s. And so the program in India was in keeping with Rusk's attitude of what we should do.

I and others involved in agricultural aid agreed with Rusk in wanting to make use of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Norman Borlaug went with one of the FAO people on a review of countries of North Africa and the Middle East, and he and his partner wrote a recommendation to the Rockefeller Foundation that the foundation support the training of young wheat breeders and small grain breeders in these countries. These are pretty much the same countries we visited in 1950 on our tour for the Point Four program. Borlaug recommended the funding of such a program and I supported it. The foundation made a grant of \$150,000 for the program in 1961, and in 1963 or 1964 the foundation made a second grant, for \$170,000. The grants provided for the training of people from these North African and Middle East countries in Mexico, where Borlaug was working. So that's the way the program was implemented.

But you know it's unreal to be able to go all over the world, with the World Bank or any other organization, and take an assignment for several months and work with everybody. It's amazing and fantastic to me to remember that I worked on all these programs. That's why I've told you that revisiting my career by going through my papers so many years after the events they document was rather challenging for me.

GESELBRACHT: What was the next part of your career after you finished your work for the Rockefeller Foundation?

MOSEMAN: That's when I joined the U.S. Agency for International Development; I worked there from 1965 to 1967. I also worked with Orville Freeman in the Secretary of Agriculture's office from April to June, 1961. This was on the basis of a call from President Kennedy to the members of his Cabinet in which he told them he was dissatisfied with the status of agricultural research. Freeman said he wanted me to come work with him, and I agreed that I would work for that three month period.

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I worked with the USAID program as a member of their research advisory committee for two years. During this time, I decided that building large research institutes was costing more and more money, and that we shouldn't build them anymore. We should instead, I thought, come closer to the farmers in the countryside. The trustees of the Rockefeller

Foundation were no longer pleased at the idea of building new research institutes. Art Moser, who was head of the Agricultural Development Council, suggested that I ought to leave the Rockefeller Foundation and give my time to organizing agricultural research. And I said, “Well if I’m going to do that I have to have a place to hang my hat.” So he offered me a position with the Agricultural Development Council.

GESELBRACHT: So you went from USAID to the Agricultural Development Council.

MOSEMAN: That’s right.

SOWELL: About your involvement in agricultural development programs in the developing world, do you really trace it back to this Point Four mission that you went on in 1950? Is that where your interest and involvement began, or had you had an interest in this even before that?

MOSEMAN: Even before that, because when, early in my career, I worked with the University of Nebraska and the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the Great Plains regional program that I described earlier in this interview, I saw what good results this program had, and I saw how well things worked out when you used federal programs, state programs, and ideas and practices from different disciplines. And I had a fantastic job. And Norm Borlaug got his basic ideas from this Great Plains regional program too. So it was just a matter of getting all of this transferred to India, to Indonesia, to the Philippines, to the Sudan, and to other areas too. We had developed a pattern and applied it to all these areas.

I think the most unique thing that happened was in Malaysia, because Art Moser, with whom I had worked at the Agricultural Development Council, Art Moser and I took a trip to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines—that part of the world. When we got to Malaysia there was another Agricultural Development Council person there who was working in the sociology area with Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. He, Tun Razak, invited me to come back and review Malaysia’s agriculture. I did that in May and June of 1968, and I prepared a report for Tun Razak. He then asked if I would come back again and help draft a law to set up the Malaysia Agricultural Research and Development Institute. I did this, and you can see documentation of my work on this law in my papers. So I helped draft the law that established the Malaysia Agricultural Research and Development Institute.

My papers document too what happened when the Malaysia Agricultural Research and Development Institute was established. I reviewed newspaper reports, the responses of [10]

different people in the country to the new institute, I wanted to know how these people viewed what I had helped do. It is important to know how you look in the eyes of the people you think you are helping.

GESELBRACHT: Thank you, Dr. Moseman, for allowing us to interview you.

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