

Music 45 seconds with text on screen:

“We won’t have anything but trouble if we put all you economists together.
But the President wants it,
and what the President wants, the President shall have.”

Jamie Whitten
U.S. Congressman, 1941 – 1995
as cited by Dr. Willard Cochrane

“I served as Secretary of Agriculture for 8 long-short years.
I can say quite candidly that hardly a week went by,
and I might say hardly a day went by,
when I didn’t confer with or review material from ERS professionals
which provided me very important guideposts along the decisionmaking path.”

Orville Freeman
Secretary of Agriculture, 1961 – 1969

In celebration of the ERS 50th Anniversary

Founding FathERS

Economic Research Service

Dr. Katherine R. Smith, ERS Administrator:

On a beautiful day in the summer of 2010, I had the opportunity to interview two remarkable men Willard Cochrane and John Schnittker. Willard Cochrane was agricultural advisor to John F. Kennedy during his campaign for the presidency and he played an important role which we’ll learn more about in the USDA and the past of the Economic Research Service. John Schnittker now referred to as the father of agricultural economic consulting was also in the USDA at point in that time he was with the equivalent of the chief economist’s office and later served in the early years of ERS’s history as the deputy secretary of agriculture.

Text on screen: Two Remarkable Men

Narrator:

Dr. Willard Cochrane can truly be called the “Father of ERS.” While serving as the Director of Agricultural Economics, he developed a vision of ERS as a source of sound, science-based economic information that continues to guide the Agency’s research. As the first head of the

Department's Staff Economists Group, Dr. John Schnittker helped Dr. Cochrane build the foundation for ERS's role of providing solid, unbiased analytical research to support policy decisions.

Image of Dr. Willard Cochrane:

Dean, Office of International Programs, University of Minnesota, 1965 – 70
Director of Agricultural Economics, USDA, 1961 – 64
Agricultural Advisor to John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign, 1960
Professor of Agricultural Economics University of Minnesota, 1951 - 60 and 1970 – 81
Economist, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, USDA, 1943 - 47

Image of Dr. John Schnittker:

Undersecretary of Agriculture, USDA 1965 – 69
Director of Agricultural Economics, USDA 1964 – 65
Leader of Staff Economists Group, USDA 1961 – 64
Senior Staff Economist, President's Council of Economic Advisors, 1958 – 59
Professor of Agricultural Economics, Kansas State University, 1956 - 61 and 1969 - 71

Narrator:

ERS can trace its roots to its predecessor agency, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Throughout its existence, the BAE acquired a full chorus of critics, including USDA program agencies, farm organizations, and legislators. Representative Jamie Whitten of Mississippi, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, was a powerful critic in Congress. He played a major role in the demise of the 30-year-old BAE, which was abolished in 1953 amidst political and ideological conflicts.

Narrator:

In 1960, Willard Cochrane and John Kenneth Galbraith became Presidential campaign advisors to Senator John F. Kennedy

Video: Cochrane: When I became his agricultural advisor in the campaign, he was willing to take advice on agriculture but he himself I would say prided himself on not knowing anything about agriculture.

Narrator:

Dr. Cochrane and Dr. Galbraith pushed Kennedy throughout the campaign to revive economics in agriculture.

Video: Cochrane: “We wrote numerous letters and so forth, but none of them did any good. But during the campaign of ‘60, Galbraith was Kennedy’s advisor on everything, not just agriculture, but fine arts, Indian art, and whatnot. Anyway, but I was there on agriculture. (1:41 to 2:20)

Cochrane: All during the campaign, Galbraith and I had poured into Kennedy’s ear that the BAE should be reestablished.

Video: Cochrane: The only thing now we were suggesting we had to give it a different name cause we were afraid that Jamie Whitten would cut us off at the pass. So that we came up with the name ERS.

Narrator:

After convincing President Kennedy and getting approval from Orville Freeman, the new Secretary of Agriculture, the only person left to confront regarding the creation of ERS was Jamie Whitten.

Video: Cochrane: “We had the okay, and then who’s going to go tell Jamie Whitten? Since I was the main guy pushing this thing, it was me. So I go up there and I told him what we’d done and I told him we were going to create these two agencies, the Statistical Reporting Service and the Economic Research Service, and they would report to the Director of Economics. That’s when Jamie said to me, ‘I am opposed or I am against to putting all you economists together.’ These aren’t his exact words, but it’s something like this... ‘We won’t have anything but trouble if we put all you economists together. But the President wants it, and what the President wants, the President shall have.’”

Narrator:

When tasked with organizing ERS, Dr. Cochrane borrowed from the BAE and created a division structure strikingly similar to what is in place today. Many of the economists from the BAE were pulled back together from other USDA agencies to form ERS.

Video: Cochrane: “With only modest revisions, I put something back together again like my experience from the old BAE.”

Video: Schnittker: “When Will established the ERS, he put it in about 7 divisions: the Economic and Statistical Analysis Division headed by Fred Waugh, Outlook and Situation headed by Bushrod Allen (?), Farm Economics by Hugh Stewart, Market Economics by Ken Olgren,

Foreign Economics by Sherman Johnson, Development and Trade by Anderson and Ken Bachman, and afterwards we put in the Rural Economics Group in 1964

Narrator:

Dr. Cochrane saw the new Agency's role as providing a flow of objective and unbiased research to inform agricultural policy decision making. During a half century as an "honest broker" of economic information, ERS has faced significant challenges and made great contributions.

Dr. Katherine R, Smith:

As ERS celebrates 50 years, we look back at the remarkable accomplishments of the past and the people who created the ERS we have today and yet we have to look forward to the future so much is ahead.

Text on screen:

Challenge

Staying Relevant

Video: Schnittker: "The biggest challenge for ERS, then and now, was to stay relevant to the emerging problems in an increasingly fast moving food and agricultural environment. And to be ahead of those problems, if at all possible. I think they've handled that pretty well. I can look back in my own mind and see times when the agency and the people there may have lagged a little bit and got behind the curve, and other times when they have been well ahead of the curve."

Text on screen:

Challenge

Economics, Not Politics

Video: Schnittker: "There is an inherent conflict for an economist. But he simply has to make sure that the people he is advising know his official expert economic analysis and then he separates any political judgment and political advice he might want to give from his economic judgment when those occasions arise."

Text on screen:

Contribution

Providing Data, Analysis, and Research

Video: Schnittker: "I think through its accumulation of data, its analysis of data, and its information on the environment, the commodities, the crops, the livestock, and through its publications, it makes a contribution nationally as Dr. Cochrane has said, but it also makes a

particular contribution to the universities, to the research economists who are out in the universities, who rely heavily upon ERS's data and ERS analysis for the work that they do in the states.”

Text on screen:

Contribution
Economic Unit for the Nation

Video: Cochrane “I’ve always felt that ERS did a good job as the economic unit for the nation. And that was my view in creating ERS that it could do what none of the colleges could do. It could take the national view.”

Text on screen:

Contribution
Informing Decisionmaking
Example: The Food Stamp Program

Video: Schittker: “In 1961, Dr. Cochrane not only came in as the Director of Ag. Economics to establish the ERS and the Statistical Reporting Service, but he came in as the principal advocate for the reestablishment of the Food Stamp Program. And that is a point of history I don’t want to forget. Fred Waugh’s idea and Will Cochrane’s, and some other people’s, support within the Office of the Secretary, led President Kennedy to create the pilot food stamp program in 1961 to be done by executive order without ever going to Congress. It became nationwide and is now a grand program taking billions and billions of dollars worth of food to the most needy in the United States.”

Video: Cochrane: “I’m very proud of ERS. I created it, and I think it did a good job. I really do.”

Text on screen with music 10 seconds:

“The Economic Research Service
is the honest mirror to
agriculture and rural America...”

Don Paarlberg
Special Assistant for Economic Affairs
and
Food-For-Peace Coordinator, 1958-1961

Credits with music 30 seconds

Dr. Williard W. Cochrane
Dr. John A. Schnittker
Dr. Katherine R. Smith

Filming of Dr. Cochrane and Dr. Schnittker on location in Minneapolis, Minnesota by Bill Carlson Films

Filming of Dr. Smith at ERS by Robert Donegan

Additional images and video by:

Dr. Schnittker
United States Department of Agriculture
Footage provided by Thought Equity Motion
Special Collections, National Agricultural Library
Library of Congress
Getty Images
Library of Congress
Dr. Cochrane

Music:

Various tracks, Digital Juice, Inc.
Haydn: Variations in F Minor, Hob. XVII:6
Performed by Raul Manjarrez

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Richard Rothery

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