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# Farm Aid: a Case Study of a Charity Rock Organization

Andrew Palen

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

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FARM AID: A CASE STUDY OF A CHARITY ROCK ORGANIZATION

by

Andrew M. Palen

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in Media Studies

at

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

December 2016

## ABSTRACT

### FARM AID: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF A CHARITY ROCK ORGANIZATION

by

Andrew M. Palen

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2016  
Under the Supervision of Professor David Pritchard

This study examines the impact that the non-profit organization Farm Aid has had on the farming industry, policy, and the concert realm known as charity rock. This study also examines how the organization has maintained its longevity. By conducting an evaluation on Farm Aid and its history, the organization's messaging and means to communicate, a detailed analysis of the past media coverage on Farm Aid from 1985-2010, and a phone interview with Executive Director Carolyn Mugar, I have determined that Farm Aid's impact is complex and not clear. Farm Aid, while very active in the political sphere, including lobbying for certain reforms, has not had a direct impact on policy. Furthermore, this study has shown that Farm Aid has been able to maintain its longevity by changing its messaging and mode of communication as well as aligning itself with a shift in food culture that promotes healthy food. Lastly, I will show how Farm Aid is an example of a successful charity rock organization that has raised both awareness and money without achieving the main goal: altering policy.

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journey of figuring out what you want to do with your life, where you want to go, what you want to learn, and, ultimately, who you want to be as an individual, I implore you to heed this advice: money and materials do not buy happiness. Rather, it's all of life's experiences – the good, the bad, and the downright ugly – that will shape you into who you become. It will not be the experiences alone, but, rather, how you react to them. Love and the golden rule will always supersede; with them, you cannot fail. I will always be here for you all. Love you boys.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over a cool breeze blowing in the parking lot of Miller Park stadium in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a crackly voice could be heard shouting, “In the Constitution, it says for the protection and well-being of its citizens. Now goddamn it, they always got the money for the protection, but they never have the money for the well-being.”<sup>1</sup> John Mellencamp’s words were met with a roaring applause.

Members of the media and farming community had gathered in the shadows of the stadium on October 2, 2010 for a press conference to hear Farm Aid board members Willie Nelson, Neil Young, Dave Matthews, John Mellencamp, and Carolyn Mugar discuss why the family farm was important to sustaining healthy, locally grown food. It was evident that Farm Aid wasn’t just about an all-day concert and a good time. Farm Aid was about making a statement.

On that day at Miller Park, Farm Aid held its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert. Before a crowd of approximately 35,000,<sup>2</sup> performing artists pledged their support for the family farmer. Press coverage included interviews with the Farm Aid board of directors, the performing artists, policymakers, farmers, and concertgoers. Local and national media outlets ran stories on the various events Farm Aid held that weekend as well as the organization’s success in raising money to help the family farmer.

Miller Park had turned into a giant education and entertainment venue. Coupled with the all-day concert were concession stands that served organic and locally sourced food from family farms. In addition, exhibits were set up in Farm Aid’s Homegrown Village that were designed to

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Palen, *Farm Aid Press Conference*, audio recording of Farm Aid press conference presented by members of the Farm Aid board and staff at Helfaer Field, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 2, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Austin Scaggs, “Farm Aid Turns 25 With All-Star Jam,” *Rolling Stone*, October 28, 2010, 17-18.

educate attendees on the benefits of purchasing products from local family farms rather than factory farms.<sup>3</sup> Farm Aid was attempting to convey to its audience that this is more than just a concert; Farm Aid is a way of life.

As a spectator, I was impressed by the overall size of the event and the attention that Farm Aid received from the media, policymakers, and celebrities. Just as Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett declared October 2, 2010, Farm Aid Day in Milwaukee,<sup>4</sup> I began to wonder that if this organization existed for 25 years, how successful has it really been in achieving its goals? Farm Aid seems to have the right ingredients for a recipe for success: rally behind an occupation cemented in American history and symbolism; combine that with conveying how important food that comes from farmers is aligned with healthy living and appearances from a slew of popular rock and country musicians; add in political support from city and state policymakers; and mix it all in with a significant amount of national and local media coverage. Yet, given the tone set by speakers at the press conference, the impression was that an all-out war was being waged against the family farmer and the battleground was both on your kitchen table and in the halls of Congress.

I began to think that something was missing. If 35,000 people were attending the 2010 Farm Aid concert, and potentially thousands more were watching live on television, coupled with the national media covering the event and policymakers expressing their support to help the family farmer, and combined with 24 previous years of coverage and support, then Farm Aid shouldn't still exist. One could easily think that enough money would have been raised to help the family farmer. Or with the amount of policymaker attention it has received, Farm Aid should

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<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster defines a factory farm as a large industrialized farm; *especially*: a farm on which large numbers of livestock are raised indoors in conditions intended to maximize production at minimal cost. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/factory%20farm>.

<sup>4</sup> Theresa Kenney, "Farm Aid 25: Growing Hope for America," *examiner.com*, October 2, 2010, <http://www.examiner.com/article/farm-aid-25-growing-hope-for-america>.

have been a catalyst for significant legislation that was beneficial to the family farmer. But that did not seem to be the case. The tone of those speaking at the press event was stern and focused. There was clearly plenty of work Farm Aid felt the government needed to do to help the family farmer. The media may be influential in changing the ranking and importance of an issue, but that does not necessarily mean that those issues will result in action. Perhaps that is why an organization like Farm Aid relies on media coverage and policymaker participation. The more attention that Farm Aid can get, the bigger the opportunity for viewers to join the coalition of protecting and helping the family farmer. Farm Aid is depending on getting noticed by someone who will listen and advocate for the farmer and the organization.

This thesis examines how Farm Aid has relied on the media to accomplish its goals and to remain in the public eye. This research will also tell the story behind Farm Aid, what's not under the history section of its website, its successes and failures, how Farm Aid used sponsorships from companies that failed to help the family farmer in their own business, and how it uses music as a form of public communication to attract policymakers, the press, and concertgoers. This thesis will examine the impact Farm Aid has had on helping the family farmer, changing public policy, as well as how the organization continues to function and exist in a world full of charitable and non-profit organizations that aim for donations.

In the following pages, I will provide a brief history on charity rock and the history of why Farm Aid came into existence. I will then conduct a detailed analysis of print media coverage on Farm Aid from the Associated Press, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Washington Post* from 1985-2010 to determine if and how the media has played a role in Farm Aid's impact and longevity. I will then attempt to convey the impact Farm Aid has had on policy by examining policymaker involvement with Farm Aid, the legislative

action those policymakers proposed, and finally congressional testimony by Farm Aid board members. I will then demonstrate how Farm Aid's consistent communication and evolving messaging, while taking advantage of the birth of social media, has played the largest role in Farm Aid's longevity. Lastly, I will take an in-depth look at the various products Farm Aid has produced to expand its audience, the organization's sponsorship history, and how the downsizing of the concert led to the successful production model it still employs in 2016.

## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

### I. Public Communication

Researchers argue that the media does not necessarily tell audiences what to think but, rather, what to think about.<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon is referred to as agenda-setting. The amount of news coverage dedicated to a particular topic influences whether audiences rate it as more important than those topics that are not covered as extensively.<sup>6</sup> However, citizens become informed by means other than just simply the news. Public communication, which includes the news, also includes other aspects such as advertising, social media, and events and functions. Interpersonal communication also plays a significant role in how citizens learn about particular issues, particularly through their own experiences and discussions with others.<sup>7</sup>

Music is also a form of public communication. Music *functions* as a source of communication. Audiences respond to music in physical, emotional, and cognitive ways.<sup>8</sup> More

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (Summer, 1972): 176-187. See also Everett M. Rogers, *History of Communication Study: A Biographical Approach* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 238.

<sup>7</sup> David H. Weaver, Jian-Hua Zhu, and Lars Willnat, "The Bridging Function of Interpersonal Communication in Agenda-Setting" in *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Winter, 1992): 856-867, 857.

<sup>8</sup> James Lull, "Popular Music and Communication: An Introduction," in *Popular Music and Communication*, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 19.

important, though, are the messages musicians convey to their audience members through the song itself or as banter between songs.

Citizens receive much of their information through all forms of media. The ability of the media to shape what an audience thinks about makes the media an important facet for shaping various agendas. Agendas are defined as “lists of issues or problems around which activity is ordered.”<sup>9</sup> Public communication, such as media reporting on an issue, seems to move issues up on an agenda. If this is true, then other forms of public communication, such as music, may also influence both the public and policymakers.

## **II. Charity Rock**

Public performances have long been used to raise awareness, solicit donations, and influence policymakers.<sup>10</sup> For this study, a musical public performance is defined as “those forms of consumption of music that are either live or pseudo-live.”<sup>11</sup> Consuming music in a pseudo-live environment involves the transmission of a live performance via technology.<sup>12</sup> For example, people who view a live performance on television are subjected to many of the same performances and the same messages as those in attendance at the actual live performance.

Rock concerts are associated with more than just youth culture. Certain performances have a more focused goal than just throwing a big party. These mega-events are considered “socially conscious mass concerts”<sup>13</sup> or charity rock. These concerts “involve the creation of a variety of cultural products – live performances, worldwide broadcasts, ensemble recordings,

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Jacob and Robert L. Lineberry, “Agendas and the Rise of Issues” in *Governmental Responses to Crime: Crime on Urban Agendas*, eds. Herbert Jacob and Robert L. Lineberry (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice; National Institute of Justice, 1982), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Billy Bragg, Tiffaney Cheng, Susan Fast, Simon Frith, Reebee Garofalo, Holly George-Warren, Karen Pegley and Will Straw, “Who is the World?: Reflections on Music and Politics Twenty Years after Live Aid,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* Vol. 17, No. 3 (December, 2005): 324-344, 328.

<sup>11</sup> Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 198.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>13</sup> Reebee Garofalo, “Understanding Mega-Events: If We Are the World, Then How Do We Change It?,” in *Rockin’ the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garofalo et al., (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 16.

compilation LPs, home videos, and/or ‘The Making of...’ documentaries – each of which can be produced and consumed in a variety of ways.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, many of these events solicit corporate sponsors, celebrities from across the entertainment spectrum, political figures, and media coverage from multiple outlets. These events capitalize on both the importance of the live public performance and the pseudo-live performance. Any type of media coverage that such events garner is publicity that further serves the event organizer’s goals.

### **A. Previous Charity Rock Concerts**

In 1971, former Beatle George Harrison, distraught by images he saw of starving refugee children in Bangladesh, co-organized one of the first highly publicized benefit concerts: a one-day, celebrity-filled concert called the Concert for Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> The concert, held at Madison Square Garden in New York City, raised \$240,000 for the United Nation’s Children’s Fund for Relief to Refugee Children of Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> Additional money was raised for the fund from an album of the concert as well as a feature-length film.<sup>17</sup>

However, problems began to occur for the organizers immediately following the event. The distributor of the album, Capitol Records, demanded a share from the profits of the album.<sup>18</sup> George Harrison eventually agreed to the demand.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately for the starving children who needed financial assistance, the Internal Revenue Service stepped in and began to ask questions about why Capitol Records was profiting from a fundraising event.<sup>20</sup> Approximately \$8.8 million was held in escrow until the audit was complete in 1982 – more than ten years after the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>15</sup> “About the Concert,” Concert for Bangladesh, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://theconcertforbangladesh.com/theconcert/>.

<sup>16</sup> Darrell M. West, “Angelina, Mia, and Bono: Celebrities and International Development,” (paper presented at the Brookings Blum Roundtable, August 1, 2007), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Connelly, “UNICEF Finally Receives Money for Bangladesh,” *Rolling Stone*, April 1, 1982, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Charles E. Fager, “Music and a Message,” *Christian Century*, January 26, 1972, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Shawny Anderson, “Farm Aid: A Fantasy Theme Analysis” (Master of Arts Thesis, Ball State University, 1987), 23.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23.

Concert for Bangladesh took place.<sup>21</sup> More heartbreaking, however, is that UNICEF claimed roughly 6 million Bangladesh children died during the ten-year audit.<sup>22</sup>

Other musicians have taken a solo approach to raising money and attempting to change public policy. From 1973 to 1981 singer/songwriter Harry Chapin raised \$4.5 million to fight hunger.<sup>23</sup> Chapin was well known among policymakers for his relentless lobbying.<sup>24</sup> Ralph Nader declared Chapin the “most effective outsider” he had ever seen in Washington.<sup>25</sup> Chapin’s lobbying led to the creation of the Presidential Commission on Domestic and International Hunger and Malnutrition in 1978.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Chapin was posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1987 for his consistent efforts for fighting against world hunger.<sup>27</sup>

In 1979, musicians Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Graham Nash, and John Hall formed Musicians United for Safe Energy (MUSE).<sup>28</sup> The organization aimed to raise awareness about the negative effects of nuclear energy.<sup>29</sup> In September of 1979, MUSE organized a series of concerts known as the “No Nukes” concerts.<sup>30</sup> Those concerts were recorded and later released

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathon Cooper, Lisa Russell, and Mary Shaughnessy, “Some Concerts that Worked, and Some that Didn’t,” *People*, 33 February 25, 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Connelly, “UNICEF Finally Receives Money for Bangladesh,” *Rolling Stone*, April 1, 1982, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Darrell M. West, “Angelina, Mia, and Bono: Celebrities and International Development,” (paper presented at the Brookings Blum Roundtable, August 1, 2007), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Dave Marsh, “Singing for the World’s Supper,” *Rolling Stone*, April 6, 1978, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Dave Marsh, “Harry Chapin: 1942-1981,” *Rolling Stone*, September 3, 1981, 25.

<sup>26</sup> West, “Angelina, Mia, and Bono,” 3.

<sup>27</sup> Dennis Polkow, “Fighting Hunger with a Song: Harry Chapin Remembered,” *The Christian Century*, August 13, 1986, 710. Matthew Glassman, “Congressional Gold Medals, 1776-2012,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 5, 2012, 5, accessed April 15, 2012, [http://www.senate.gov/CRSReports/crs-publish.cfm?pid=0E%2C\\*PL%5B%3C%230%20%20%0A](http://www.senate.gov/CRSReports/crs-publish.cfm?pid=0E%2C*PL%5B%3C%230%20%20%0A).

<sup>28</sup> “James Taylor...and Jackson Browne ‘No Nukes’ Concert, Album, and Film 1979,” Waddy Wachtel, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://waddywachtelinfo.com/NoNukes.html>.

<sup>29</sup> West, “Angelina, Mia, and Bono,” 3. “James Taylor...and Jackson Browne ‘No Nukes’ Concert, Album, and Film 1979,” Waddy Wachtel, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://waddywachtelinfo.com/NoNukes.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash, and Harvey Wasserman, “Commentary: Stealth Nuke Effort Should Be Stopped,” *NukeFree.org*, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://www.nukefree.org/node/34>.

on vinyl in 1979 and compact disc in 1997.<sup>31</sup> In 2007, Browne, Raitt, and Nash helped found [nukefree.org](http://www.nukefree.org), a website aimed at curbing a \$50 billion government proposal in the 2007 Energy Bill that sought guaranteed loans for building new atomic reactors in the United States.<sup>32</sup> The website obtained approximately 120,000 signatures. The loan guarantees were subsequently pulled from the bill, but whether the petition was the reason remains unanswered.<sup>33</sup> Organizers of the original concert re-formed for a new No Nukes concert in 2011 that aimed, again, at curbing the building of nuclear reactors in the United States and to support relief efforts for the Japan nuclear disaster.<sup>34</sup> The concert took place on August 7 in Palo Alto, California featuring the founders of MUSE along with Keb Mo, Jason Mraz, the Doobie Brothers, and Tom Morello.<sup>35</sup> According to the MUSE website, the organization has distributed approximately \$245,000 to various beneficiaries.<sup>36</sup>

In 1985, a new, global, concert that changed the face of fundraising concerts took place simultaneously in Philadelphia and London. On July 13, 1985, Live Aid<sup>37</sup> became the first global mega-event that attempted to bridge the gap between politics and music.<sup>38</sup> The concert, organized by musician Bob Geldof, was attended by 162,000 people, reached an international

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<sup>31</sup> “No Nukes - From The Muse Concerts For A Non-Nuclear Future - Madison Square Garden - September 19-23, 1979,” accessed November 1, 2016, <https://www.discogs.com/Various-No-Nukes-The-Muse-Concerts-For-A-Non-Nuclear-Future/master/196076>.

<sup>32</sup> “About Us,” [NukeFree.org](http://www.nukefree.org/about), accessed October 29, 2011, <http://www.nukefree.org/about>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, <http://www.nukefree.org/about>.

<sup>34</sup> “Musicians United for Safe Energy,” accessed October 29, 2011, <http://musiciansunited4safeenergy.com/index.html>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, <http://musiciansunited4safeenergy.com/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, <http://musiciansunited4safeenergy.com/index.html>.

<sup>37</sup> “Viewers were encouraged to phone in to their national contact and pledge their contribution. The records and concerts shared an air of patriotism; the notion of each nation doing its bit for the common cause – ‘donationalism,’ and collectively they emphasized a sense of community and togetherness.” Shuker, “*Understanding Popular Music Culture*,” 247-248.

<sup>38</sup> Bragg, et al., “Who is the World,” 324. See also, Garofalo, “Understanding Mega-Events,” 26. “What made Live Aid different from the previous tradition of benefit gigs was that it changed the meaning of the musical charity show from a kind of community self-help, doing something about our problems, to a kind of populist noblesse oblige, doing something about them.” Bragg, et al., “Who is the World,” 334.



audience of more than one billion people and raised roughly \$140 million, including merchandising, video, and music sales, for the starving people of Ethiopia.<sup>39</sup>

Live Aid spawned what has become the de-facto musical outlet for exposing large audiences to important political and societal issues.<sup>40</sup> This form of “charity rock”<sup>41</sup> began a new wave of politics as well. Policymakers began attending these events in an attempt to show their support and persuade the public to donate money towards the cause. More importantly, policymakers pledged their commitment to the cause, promising much-needed policy change in Washington.

However, rarely do mega-events maintain a presence in the public consciousness long enough to warrant continual financial donations and the attention of policymakers. Live Aid founder and visionary Bob Geldof recognized the difficulty of maintaining a presence in the public’s consciousness: “We’ve used the spurious glamour of pop music to draw attention to a situation, and we’ve overloaded the thing with symbolism to make it reach people. But people get bored easily. People may have been profoundly affected by the Live Aid day – some were shattered by it – but that does not translate into a massive change in consciousness.”<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, most mega-events that raise money to combat large societal issues rarely raise enough to address the causes of the problem, let alone solve it.<sup>43</sup>

The criticism that Live Aid faced did not focus only on the funds and food to help starving people in Ethiopia. The sponsors and artists who participated in Live Aid also reaped

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<sup>39</sup> West, “Angelina, Mia, and Bono,” 3. H. Louise Davis, “Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices from Live Aid to Product Red,” *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2010): 89-118, 95.

<sup>40</sup> “Nineteen eighty five – the year of Live Aid and “We Are the World” – is remembered as the defining moment in the phenomenon dubbed ‘charity rock.’ Praised for its humanitarian impulse and fundraising potential and blasted for trivializing important issues.” Bragg, et al., *Who is the World*,” 325.

<sup>41</sup> Charity rock can be seen as a “string of socially conscious mass concerts.” Garofalo, “Understanding Mega-Events,” 16.

<sup>42</sup> David Breskin, “Bob Geldof: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, December 5, 1985, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Garofalo, “Understanding Mega-Events,” 27.

benefits and, consequently, faced scrutiny. Mega-events such as Live Aid may generate large sums of money in an attempt to help people who are less fortunate, but mega-events are also multi-faceted.<sup>44</sup> Live Aid, in particular, was responsible for opening new markets, generating a new fan base for performers as well as providing advertisement for its many sponsors.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the cities where these events were held benefited from free publicity that ultimately encouraged tourism, and were forever associated with the event and its cause.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the rousing success of Live Aid, organizers faced difficult questions on where the money raised was allocated. Although there has not been an in-depth evaluation of how the \$140 million was disbursed, Live Aid faced considerable criticism after reports surfaced that upon arrival of in Ethiopia much of the food was rotted and transportation efforts to get it there sooner had failed.<sup>47</sup> In addition, several reports suggested, Geldof and his organizers were not prepared to deal with the strife and turmoil that was involved with becoming active in Ethiopia's politics.<sup>48</sup>

Twenty years later, Geldof, and other organizers, put together a three-day concert series known as Live 8.<sup>49</sup> Rather than being held in one or two cities, the concerts were held in eleven different cities (London, Cornwall, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Philadelphia, Barrie, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Moscow and Edinburgh).<sup>50</sup> Similar to the original Live Aid concert, the focus of the Live 8 concerts was centered on African poverty and starvation.<sup>51</sup> However, rather than

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>46</sup> Davis, "Feeding the World a Line," 97.

<sup>47</sup> West, "Angelina, Mia, and Bono," 3. Garofalo, "Understanding Mega-Events," 28.

<sup>48</sup> Garofalo, "Understanding Mega-Events," 28.

<sup>49</sup> Davis, "Feeding the World a Line," 105.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 105.

raising money, the focus of the concert was to collect signatures to present to the leaders of the G8 summit occurring that week.<sup>52</sup>

Organizers of the concert hoped to convey to G8 leaders that canceling debt and loosening trade restrictions with African nations would help African governments provide aid to starving Africans.<sup>53</sup> Over the course of the three-day telecast, some thirty million signatures were collected and presented to Tony Blair, the leader of the summit.<sup>54</sup> Surprisingly, Live 8 “had a direct influence upon the policies and agreements made at the G8 summit. All leaders that were present agreed to cancel the national debt of eighteen African nations immediately, followed by another twenty countries in the following years. In addition, the G8 leaders promised to provide \$50 billion in aid.”<sup>55</sup>

Sadly, one by one, the leaders of the G8 summit began to renege on their promised aid and debt relief.<sup>56</sup> By June of 2009, four years after the Live 8 concerts, the United Kingdom was the only country that followed through on its pledged contributions and aid.<sup>57</sup>

### **III. Farm Aid**

#### **A. History**

Farm Aid is a non-profit organization located in Cambridge, Massachusetts that aims to keep family farmers on their land. As of 2012, Farm Aid has an eleven-member board and a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>56</sup> Larry Elliot and Kate Connolly, “In 2005, G8 Pledged \$50bn for Africa. Now the Reality,” *The Guardian*, April 25, 2007, accessed May 23, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/apr/25/uk.development?INTCMP=SRCH>, cited in H. Louise Davis, “Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices from Live Aid to Product Red,” *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 3 (2010): 108.

<sup>57</sup> Davis, “Feeding the World a Line,” 108.

thirteen member staff.<sup>58</sup> From 1985 through 2011, Farm Aid has raised approximately \$39 million – most coming from its annual concert.<sup>59</sup> Farm Aid distributes money through its organized grant program, its hotline, and by funding efforts to help the family farmer.<sup>60</sup>

Initially, Farm Aid’s organizers wanted the concert to act as a catalyst to raise money that would be used to prevent farmers from losing their land, and to create awareness of the plight of the family farm.<sup>61</sup> Farm Aid had originally intended the money to go directly to family farmers, but that would have, ultimately, proved problematic. Instead, Farm Aid identified programs in each state that the money would be designated to. Programs such as help lines and grant programs were among the recipients. However, over the course of time, Farm Aid changed its focus. Its mission is no longer solely concentrated on raising awareness and changing public policy. Rather, Farm Aid’s mission has evolved into a simple, encompassing statement: keep family farmers on their land and in business.<sup>62</sup> Farm Aid serves its mission by focusing on four categories: promoting food from family farms, growing the Good Food Movement, helping farmers thrive, and taking action to change the system.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The Farm Aid board is composed of Willie Nelson (President), Paul English (Treasurer), Lana Nelson (Secretary), Neil Young, Dave Matthews, John Mellencamp, David Anderson, Richard Fields, Joel Katz, Mark Rothbaum, and Evelyn Shriver. “A Bit About Us: Board and Staff,” Farm Aid, accessed June 13, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723677/k.961B/Board\\_and\\_Staff.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723677/k.961B/Board_and_Staff.htm).

<sup>59</sup> “A Bit About Us: About Us,” Farm Aid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm).

<sup>60</sup> “A Bit About Us: Grant Program,” Farm Aid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723621/k.9C20/Grant\\_Program.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723621/k.9C20/Grant_Program.htm)

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, “Farm Aid: A Fantasy Theme Analysis,” 3. Reebee Garofalo, “Making Music/Making Bread: Charity Rock for Social Change,” in *Farm Aid: A Song for America*, ed. Holly George Warren et al. (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>62</sup> “A Bit About Us: About Us,” FarmAid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm).

<sup>63</sup> “Good food from family farmers helps you and helps farmers. Getting food directly from farmers at farmers markets or through community-support agriculture (CSAs) puts your dollars directly into the hands of family farmers and you receive the best quality food. But for more family farmers to thrive, we must get the food that they grow into urban neighborhoods, grocery stores, restaurants and schools.” “All About Good Food: Good Food,” Farm Aid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723849/k.F173/Good\\_Food.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723849/k.F173/Good_Food.htm). “For 25 years, Farm Aid has answered 1-800-FARM-AID to provide immediate and effective support services to farm families in crisis.” “A Bit About Us: About Us,”

Farm Aid's inception was not just a fluke effort that was intended to feed on the recent success of earlier benefit concerts. In 1985, the farming industry lost close to 400,000 family farm jobs – the most in any year since 1976.<sup>64</sup> In 1985, 2.2% of all jobs in the United States were farming jobs, down from 8.7% in 1960.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, of the farmers in 1985, approximately 23.7% of them were living below the poverty level.<sup>66</sup> Coupled with the U.S. Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service estimate that the total U.S. farm debt was close to \$210 billion, the farming industry was facing its largest crisis to date.<sup>67</sup> The farming crisis was largely attributed to “low prices resulting from huge surpluses of most crops, high costs, and low land values.”<sup>68</sup> The media were quick to pick up on the crisis and began running personal stories that instigated significant public support for the farmer.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, President Reagan “proposed a farm program that would eventually eliminate all government subsidies of agriculture over a fifteen year period.”<sup>70</sup> For the farming industry, it spelled disaster. Crops were selling incredibly low and the removal of government subsidies would have certainly caused more family farms to close. In 1986, a modified version of Reagan's proposal passed without the loss of subsidies.

Given how challenging the farming industry was at the time, it should come as no surprise that farmers became the focus of philanthropy. Although the first Farm Aid concert was

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FarmAid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm).

<sup>64</sup> Jane Ashley, “Bad Times Force Mass Farm Exodus,” *USA Today*, January 10, 1986, 1-A.

<sup>65</sup> George Church, “Too Much of a Good Thing,” *Time*, September 8, 1986, 22.

<sup>66</sup> Julie Stacey, “Number of Farmers Fell Sharply in 1985,” *USA Today*, January 10, 1986, 1-A.

<sup>67</sup> Tim Franklin and Steve Neal, “Farm Aid Concert Aims to Create Wealth of Publicity,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 7, 1985, 1:4.

<sup>68</sup> Anderson, “Farm Aid: A Fantasy Theme Analysis,” 36.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth R. Sheets, “Few Hopes Blossom for Farmers in Spring of '85,” *US News and World Report*, May 20, 1985, 75.

the brainchild of Willie Nelson, he gives credit for the idea to Bob Dylan.<sup>71</sup> Three months earlier at Live Aid, Dylan said, “wouldn't it be great if we did something for our own farmers right here in America?”<sup>72</sup> With the assistance of then-Illinois Governor Jim Thompson, and musicians John Mellencamp and Neil Young, Nelson began organizing the event immediately after Live Aid.<sup>73</sup>

The first Farm Aid concert was held on September 22, 1985 in Champaign, Illinois, just six weeks after Live Aid.<sup>74</sup> Close to 78,000 people paid \$17.50 per ticket to attend the concert at Memorial Stadium at the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign campus.<sup>75</sup> The entire concert was broadcast on The Nashville Network (TNN) and a three-hour period aired on syndicated networks. Organizers of the concert had hoped to solicit \$50 million in donations, but, disappointingly, only raised roughly \$10 million.<sup>76</sup> Fifty-four artists from the rock, country, and folk genres performed at the first Farm Aid including board members Nelson, Mellencamp, and Young.<sup>77</sup>

Although the first Farm Aid concert did raise a significant amount of money, it fell far short of its stated goals. This was the result of three crucial planning errors by the concert organizers: (1) the concert was timed too close to Live Aid and many viewers may have satisfied their sense or obligation to donate, (2) the concert failed to have a concrete focus or an end result

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<sup>71</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed November 19, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>73</sup> Garofalo, “Making Music/Making Bread,” 3.

<sup>74</sup> “Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>75</sup> Dave Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” in *Farm Aid: A Song for America*, ed. Holly George Warren et al. (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 2005), 53.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, “Farm Aid: A Fantasy Theme Analysis,” 3. “Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>77</sup> Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” 53.

in sight, and (3) there were not enough appeals for donations during the event.<sup>78</sup> The overall goal of \$50 million may have been optimistic as well. Moreover, after the concert was over, the media ran stories that were critical of Farm Aid as well as the performers who took part in the concert.<sup>79</sup>

Nelson moved forward with plans to hold Farm Aid 2 the following year despite not reaching its initial goal. Farm Aid 2 was held on July 4, 1986, in Manor Downs, Texas, and broadcast over VH-1.<sup>80</sup> The roster of 114 acts was the largest in Farm Aid history.<sup>81</sup> Two of the acts, Bob Dylan and the Grateful Dead, joined in via satellite. However, similar to the first Farm Aid concert, the second was also faced with challenges and problems. Due to logistical issues, the concert “moved sites three times in two weeks, with the final shift occurring only forty-eight hours before show time. Three miles of road had to be built overnight to get the crowd and production crews to Manor Downs.”<sup>82</sup> In addition, the concert was almost cancelled due to slow ticket sales and the failure to secure liability insurance.<sup>83</sup> Farm Aid II ultimately brought in \$500,000 in donations and \$800,000 through ticket sales; far short of the first Farm Aid concert.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Anderson, “Farm Aid: A Fantasy Theme Analysis,” 91.

<sup>79</sup> Criticisms included Farm Aid not previously disclosing where the money raised would be allocated, performances were too short, and some of the artists advocated for particular farming policy (something that Farm Aid claimed the artists would not do). Tim Franklin, “Farm Aid Politicking Sprouts into Rhubarb,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1985, 12. See also Stephen Chapman, “Celebrities vs. the Farm Problem,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 1985, 15. See also Richard Orr, “Politicking at Farm Aid Furrows Some Brows,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1985, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” 58. “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>81</sup> Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” 58.

<sup>82</sup> Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” 59. “Insurance Problems Force Concert to Switch Sites Again,” Associated Press, June 27, 1986.

<sup>83</sup> “Insurance Problems,” Associated Press, June 27, 1986. “Lack of Insurance Imperils Farm Concert,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1986.

<sup>84</sup> “Farm Aid II Donations Fall Short,” Associated Press, July 5, 1986.

Although the original idea was to hold the concert in Washington D.C., Farm Aid III was held on September 19, 1987 at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Nebraska.<sup>85</sup> The concert sold the stadium's 70,000 ticket capacity in two days.<sup>86</sup> However, the concert failed to garner the media storm as in years past. The concert raised more money than the previous year: a total of \$3.3 million.<sup>87</sup> Tickets sales made up \$1.4 million, pledges during the concert another \$1 million, \$100,000 from merchandising, \$600,000 from advertising sales, and \$200,000 from the Nebraska Cares program.<sup>88</sup> The concert would be put on hiatus for the following two years.

Facing financial challenges, Farm Aid needed to raise more money to stay in business. Farm Aid IV was held in the Hoosier Dome in Indianapolis, Indiana, on April 7, 1990, and featured an extensive lineup.<sup>89</sup> Farm Aid IV became the quickest sell-out in the organization's history, selling 45,000 tickets in less than two hours.<sup>90</sup> The all-day event touted 70 acts such as Garth Brooks and the final live appearance by the Axl Rose-led band Guns n' Roses.<sup>91</sup> The night before the concert, Mellencamp extended an invitation to Elton John to appear at Farm Aid, which he gladly accepted.<sup>92</sup> Farm Aid IV also incorporated a new message: "the well-being of our land, food and water supply depends on a network of family farmers who care about our food is grown."<sup>93</sup> The aim was to quell the amount of chemicals farmers are required to use

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<sup>85</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 59. Michael Holmes, "Willie Nelson Organizes Second Farm Aid Concert," Associated Press, July 2, 1986.

<sup>86</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 59.

<sup>87</sup> Ed Howard, "Farm Aid Starts Counting the Money," Associated Press, September 21, 1987.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 60. Ken Kusmer, "Farm Aid Benefit Concert Returns With Environmental Focus," Associated Press, April 7, 1990. Ken Kusmer, "Farm IV Raises at Least \$1.3 Million," Associated Press, April 8, 1990.

<sup>90</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 60.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 60. "Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qI15IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qI15IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>92</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 60.

<sup>93</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qI15IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qI15IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).



in harvesting their crops.<sup>94</sup> The concert was broadcast on The Nashville Network (TNN) and a two-hour highlight concert was later broadcast on CBS.<sup>95</sup> The concert generated just shy of \$1.3 million.<sup>96</sup>

After another yearlong absence, Farm Aid returned and held its fifth concert on March 14, 1992 at Texas Stadium in Irving, Texas.<sup>97</sup> About 50,000 people attended the concert and heard close to fifty acts.<sup>98</sup> Performances by Paul Simon and the recently reunited Highwaymen were some of the noted highlights of the concert. The concert raised just over \$1 million.<sup>99</sup>

Farm Aid VI saw the organization taking on an additional support role. A few weeks before the concert in Ames, Iowa on April 24, 1993, both the Mississippi and Missouri rivers flooded, causing catastrophic damage to small towns.<sup>100</sup> The stadium that would hold the Farm Aid VI concert also sustained flood damage. The concert went on. More than 40 acts played to 40,000 people.<sup>101</sup> Also of significance was the first performance of a relative of a serving president at Farm Aid. President Bill Clinton's brother Roger Clinton, spent \$6,000 to bring his band to perform at the concert.<sup>102</sup> Clinton's appearance wasn't met with warm hugs, though. Neil Young defiantly stated at the Farm Aid press conference that he was disappointed Vice-President Al Gore or Agricultural Secretary Mike Espy wasn't sent on behalf of Clinton.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Kusmer, "Farm Aid Benefit Concert Returns with Environmental Focus," Associated Press, April 7, 1990.

<sup>95</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>96</sup> Ken Kusmer, "Farm IV Raises at Least \$1.3 Million," Associated Press, April 7, 1990. "People in the News," Associated Press, January 2, 1991.

<sup>97</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 62.

<sup>98</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm). Evan Ramstad, "Country, Rock Stars Play to Help Rural Americans," Associated Press, March 14, 1992.

<sup>99</sup> "People in the News," Associated Press, November 7, 1992.

<sup>100</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 62.

<sup>101</sup> Greg Smith, "Musicians Highlight Farmers' Plight With Sixth Farm Aid," Associated Press, April 25, 1993.

<sup>102</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 63. Greg Smith, "Not All Artists Happy at Farm Aid," Associated Press, April 24, 1993.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, "Not All Artists Happy at Farm Aid," Associated Press, April 24, 1993.

The Farm Aid concert went south in 1994. Housed in the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans, the seventh Farm Aid concert was hosted by former astronaut Buzz Aldrin.<sup>104</sup> For the first time since its inception, one of the board members was absent: John Mellencamp did not attend due to an illness. The concert spotlighted Nebraska farmer Ernest Krikava. Krikava had recently been “sentenced to prison for illegally selling \$35,000 worth of his hogs during his family’s bankruptcy proceedings, to prevent the hogs from dying of starvation. The family had no food, their hogs were starving, and the bank refused to release funds to operate the farm...Krikava was later pardoned by President Bill Clinton.”<sup>105</sup> Some public officials pledged their own money toward Farm Aid. Both Louisiana Governor Edwin Edwards and Sheriff Harry Lee made personal contributions of \$10,000 to Farm Aid.<sup>106</sup>

Although Farm Aid had not organized ten concerts, the organization decided to celebrate its tenth anniversary in 1995. The concert was held on October 1, 1995 at Cardinal Stadium in Louisville, Kentucky. Approximately 47,000 people attended the concert and helped raise \$1.2 million.<sup>107</sup> The concert was also broadcast on The Nashville Network (TNN).<sup>108</sup> The tenth anniversary concert sparked a new format for Farm Aid: fewer acts and longer performance times. This was mainly a money saving measure to reduce production costs.<sup>109</sup>

Following its ten-year anniversary, Farm Aid began referring to its concerts by year rather than by numerical order. Farm Aid '96 took place on October 12, 1996 in Columbia,

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<sup>104</sup> Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” 63.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>106</sup> “Names in the News,” Associated Press, July 26, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm). Pete Iacobelli, “After 11 Years of Farm Aid, Stars Wonder if Anybody is Listening,” Associated Press, October 10, 1996.

<sup>108</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>109</sup> Hoekstra, “Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts,” 66. Jane Gibson, “Farm Aid Tries To Keep Family Farm Plight in Spotlight,” Associated Press, September 30, 1985.

South Carolina.<sup>110</sup> Again, The Nashville Network (TNN) broadcast the show.<sup>111</sup> The year saw the Carolinas ravaged by Hurricane Bertha, while the Great Plains suffered from a drought.<sup>112</sup> Farm Aid responded to farmers in Oklahoma and Texas by coordinating a haylift that provided hay to farmers who suffered financially due to the drought.<sup>113</sup> In attendance was U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman.<sup>114</sup>

Farm Aid '97 brought its share of problems to concert organizers. The show was originally booked for Texas Stadium in Dallas (where owner Jerry Jones donated the rental fee), but was forced to relocate due to poor ticket sales and a lack of corporate support.<sup>115</sup> Within two weeks the show was moved to Tinley Park, a suburb of Chicago. All the acts that were booked for the Texas show re-routed their respective tours to accommodate Farm Aid.<sup>116</sup> The concert sold out in two weeks and drew approximately 30,000 fans.<sup>117</sup> Strong ticket sales in Chicago in 1997 prompted Farm Aid to return to Tinley Park for its 1998 concert. Farm Aid '98 was sponsored by Best Buy and carried live on Country Music Television (CMT).

Best Buy returned to sponsor Farm Aid '99. The concert was held on September 12, 1999 at the Nissan Pavilion in Bristow, Virginia.<sup>118</sup> With a sold-out crowd of 23,000, the focus was not just on fundraising, but awareness.<sup>119</sup> Again, Country Music Television (CMT)

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<sup>110</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 66.

<sup>111</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>112</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 66.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>114</sup> Iacobelli, "After 11 Years of Farm Aid, Stars Wonder if Anybody is Listening," Associated Press, October 10, 1996.

<sup>115</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 68. "People in the News," Associated Press, September 5, 1997. "People in the News," Associated Press, September 17, 1997.

<sup>116</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 68.

<sup>117</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 68. "Farm Aid Sells Out in Illinois," Associated Press, October 4, 1997.

<sup>118</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>119</sup> "Sellout Crowd Attends Farm Aid Concert," Associated Press, September 12, 1999.

broadcast the concert.<sup>120</sup> Presented by Best Buy, Farm Aid's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary was also held the following year on September 17, 2000 at the Nissan Pavilion on September 17. Vice President Al Gore's wife, Tipper Gore, appeared at the event and played the conga on one of Willie Nelson's songs.<sup>121</sup> Third-party presidential candidates Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader also made appearances.<sup>122</sup> The concert was broadcast on Country Music Television (CMT).<sup>123</sup>

On September 29, 2001, despite fears from the recent terrorist attacks in New York City, Farm Aid held its concert in Noblesville, Indiana.<sup>124</sup> Dubbed "A Concert for America," the concert had a patriotic theme and many of its acts called on its 24,000 spectators to remember that family farmers are a national resource.<sup>125</sup> The performers also relied on patriotic songs to rally the crowd. From the opening notes of Arlo Guthrie covering his father's song "This Land is Your Land," to Mellencamp's recently penned tune "Peaceful World," Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World," and Martina McBride's "Independence Day," the concert was aimed more at healing than rallying.<sup>126</sup> The concert raised \$1.3 million, but expenses accounted for \$818,000 of the profit.<sup>127</sup>

The following year saw Farm Aid being held for the first time in the northeast section of the country. Held in Burgettstown, Pennsylvania on September 21, 2002, the concert sold out the venue's 23,000 seats within 48 hours of going on sale.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 71.

<sup>122</sup> "Farmers, Politicians Turn Out for 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Farm Aid Concert," Associated Press, September 17, 2000.

<sup>123</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 71. Katrina Hull, "Farm Aid Founders Stress Importance of Farm Produce in Keeping Nation Strong," Associated Press, September 29, 2001.

<sup>126</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 73.

<sup>127</sup> Craig Gustafson, "Farm Scene: Drought Turns Harvest Outlook Dismal for Many Minnesota Farmers," Associated Press, September 9, 2003.

<sup>128</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 73. "More Than 23,000 Turn Out for 15<sup>th</sup> Farm Aid," Associated Press, September 21, 2002.

In contrast, it took Farm Aid's 16<sup>th</sup> concert in 2003 two weeks to sell out the amphitheater's 20,000 seat capacity.<sup>129</sup> Sponsored by Silk Soymilk, the concert was held in Columbus, Ohio on September 7, 2003.<sup>130</sup> This year also marked the beginning of Farm Aid selling some concessions that were sourced from local, family farms.<sup>131</sup> The concert generated \$1 million in revenue.<sup>132</sup>

Silk Soymilk again sponsored Farm Aid 2004.<sup>133</sup> Roughly 20,000 people saw the concert on September 18, 2004 in Seattle, Washington.<sup>134</sup> Farm Aid began to experiment more with educating concert goers by highlighting a campaign called Farm Aid's Ten Ways Campaign – “a public information effort aimed at helping people understand the important link between family farmers and fresh, high quality food.”<sup>135</sup> The concert raised slightly more than \$1 million.<sup>136</sup>

Sponsored by Silk Soymilk, Farm Aid celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary by returning for the third time to Tinley Park, Illinois on September 18, 2005.<sup>137</sup> Farm Aid's presence was felt in the Chicago area for a full week prior to the concert. Events such as farm visits, films, tractor parades, and restaurants offering a family farm menu were just a few of the ways Farm Aid attempted to gain publicity for its celebration.<sup>138</sup> The concert was also marked by an appearance

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<sup>129</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> “Report: Farm Aid Donates Small Percentage of Funds,” Associated Press, September 17, 2005.

<sup>133</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> “Nelson Argues for Alternative Fuels,” Associated Press, September 19, 2004.

<sup>137</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm). “Silk Soymilk and Horizon Organic Sponsor Farm Aid's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration; Nation's Best-Selling Natural and Organic Brands Continue to Support Family Farms,” *Business Wire*, September 13, 2005, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20050913005087/en/Silk-Soymilk-Horizon-Organic-Sponsor-Farm-Aids>.

<sup>138</sup> “Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts,” Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qll5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm). Nathaniel Hernandez, “Farm Aid to Celebrate 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with Concert in Chicago Area,” Associated Press, July 12, 2005.

by U.S. Senator Barack Obama who spoke about the importance of the family farmer and introduced the Chicago-based band Wilco.<sup>139</sup>

Silk Soymilk presented Farm Aid 2006 in Camden, New Jersey on September 30, 2006.<sup>140</sup> Chevrolet, Wild Oats Markets, Horizon Organic, Whole Foods Markets, American Apparel, Chouinard, Toy Farmer, and Annie's Homegrown Naturals also sponsored the concert.<sup>141</sup> Farm Aid organizers were presented checks from Silk Soy Milk (\$250,000) and Chevrolet (\$153,000).<sup>142</sup> The press event prior to the concert featured local farmers as well as a school lunch lady who was adamant about changing public school food policy.<sup>143</sup> According to Farm Aid, the concert hosted 25,000 attendees and grossed approximately \$1.5 million (\$1.1 million from ticket sales).<sup>144</sup> The show was broadcast on XM Satellite Radio and simultaneously webcast on [www.farmaid.org](http://www.farmaid.org).<sup>145</sup>

Farm Aid 2007 was held in New York City on September 9. Again presented by Silk Soymilk, this year marked the first appearance by Farm Aid's Homegrown Village – an area dedicated to offering concertgoers with interactive educational workshops from family farmers.<sup>146</sup> The concert also marked the first time that local, organic family-farmed foods were served at both the concession stands and backstage.<sup>147</sup> Prior to the concert, then-Governor Eliot

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<sup>139</sup> "Barack Obama Introduces Wilco," YouTube.com, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmR32cFfGTQ>.

<sup>140</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>141</sup> "A Bit About Us: News," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.farmaid.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=qII5IhNVJsE&b=2792875&ct=3852013>.

<sup>142</sup> Roxana Hegeman, "Unrelenting Drought Taking Toll on Farm Families," Associated Press, October 3, 2006.

<sup>143</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>144</sup> "A Bit About Us: News," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.farmaid.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=qII5IhNVJsE&b=2792875&ct=3852013>. Hegeman, "Unrelenting Drought," Associated Press, October 3, 2006.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

Spitzer and New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn spoke at Farm Aid's press event.<sup>148</sup>  
The governor declared September 9, 2007 as Farm Aid Day in New York City.<sup>149</sup>

Mansfield, Massachusetts hosted Farm Aid 2008 on September 20. Whole Foods and Horizon Organic presented the concert. Almost 20,000 fans bought tickets to the all-day concert.<sup>150</sup> The Homegrown Village returned to educate concertgoers on the benefits of eating locally sourced and organic family-farmed food.

Farm Aid 2009 was held in St. Louis, Missouri on October 4. Horizon Organic returned to present Farm Aid. Just over 20,000 ticket holders walked through the door of Verizon Wireless Amphitheater.<sup>151</sup> Farm Aid continued to apply its strategy of serving only local and organic concessions at the concert as well as educating audience members in the Homegrown Village.

Farm Aid 2010 was held at Miller Park in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on October 2, 2010.<sup>152</sup> The silver anniversary marked the only time the concert was held in a Major-League Baseball stadium.<sup>153</sup> Horizon Organic, Silk Soymilk, DirecTV and Organic Valley sponsored the concert.<sup>154</sup> Approximately 35,000 people attended the concert.<sup>155</sup> PBS broadcaster Tavis Smiley was the emcee of the concert.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> "A Bit About Us: News," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.farmaid.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=qlI5IhNVJsE&b=2792875&ct=4457185>.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> "Past Farm Aid Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed November 15, 2016, <https://www.farmaid.org/concert/past-farm-aid-concerts/>.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qlI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qlI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>153</sup> "A Bit About Us: News," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.farmaid.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=qlI5IhNVJsE&b=2792875&ct=8551137>.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qlI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qlI5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

## **B. Agenda**

Farm Aid has long aimed at changing farming public policy. Farm Aid's initial goals were to simply help the family farmer during a time of crisis. Despite a few hiccups, Farm Aid has continued to hold its annual concert with varying degrees of success. Each concert has showcased many music acts, spotlighted the difficulties farmers face, and raised a significant amount of money.

Despite the organization's constant efforts to rally support, Farm Aid has not been able to further its agenda with policymakers in Washington. However, year after year, policymakers continue to support Farm Aid by making appearances at their annual concerts. Certainly, Farm Aid has been successful if it consistently garners press and political attention and continues to organize a profitable, annual concert. However, there seems to be a discrepancy between what Farm Aid succeeds in doing and what policymakers do to support Farm Aid. Since appearances by policymakers at Farm Aid concerts can be perceived as supporting Farm Aid's mission, have those same policymakers done anything outside of attending the concert to show support? Perhaps their appearances are purely symbolic in nature.

Farm Aid can be seen not only as a form of public communication, but also as a platform for public communication. Music itself is a form of public communication, but the messages that audience members hear from that music and the musicians themselves also serve as communication. Coupled with messages from farmers and Farm Aid itself, concertgoers could walk away from a Farm Aid concert with a wealth of knowledge. Farm Aid dedicates much of its efforts to educating consumers on the importance of family farms and buying food from local, organic farms. In many instances, Farm Aid will report on government policy or controversial farming practices on its website, blog, and social media sites. Farm Aid aims to influence the



action of its readers by sharing news and research that educates on Farm Aid's various advocacy efforts.

Policymakers, knowing the sheer size of an event such as Farm Aid, and that the press will certainly be in attendance, could be enticed to appear at the event. Such symbolic appearances are supportive of the cause and garner publicity as well. Farm Aid seems to have created a perfect storm of attracting musicians, press coverage, and policymakers, but what impact has Farm Aid had?

**RQ 1: How has national news outlets covered Farm Aid?**

**RQ 2: How has Farm Aid impacted public policy?**

**RQ 3: How has Farm Aid evolved?**

**A. How has Farm Aid been able to maintain its longevity?**

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

I examined national media coverage on Farm Aid. Media outlets the Associated Press, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Washington Post* were chosen because of their national reach and agenda setting capability. Those outlets have the potential for reaching the largest audiences. Search terms "Farm Aid" and "Willie Nelson" were used to identify articles that would be used. For this study, coverage was accessed through various databases including EBSCO's Newspaper Source Plus database, Google News, and the archives of each media outlet. I also obtained transcripts of available Congressional testimony that featured Farm Aid board members.

An examination into Farm Aid's communication strategy and how news coverage reflected that messaging was also done. I evaluated Farm Aid's website to determine whether there were accurate representations of events that received media coverage. An analysis of Farm

Aid's social media channels, revenue generating streams such as physical media and merchandise, and sponsorship history was also conducted looking for patterns and consistent messaging.

A phone interview with Executive Director Carolyn Mugar was conducted on April 10, 2012 to gain insight on Farm Aid's impact, the vision the board of directors has for Farm Aid, and whether there were any regrets in the organization's changing direction.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

### **RQ 1: How has national news outlets covered Farm Aid?**

#### **I. Print Media Coverage**

The inaugural Farm Aid took place just three months after Live Aid. With the large amount of press coverage Live Aid had garnered, it seemed fair to think that an equal amount of media coverage on Farm Aid would also occur. The first concert did not suffer from a lack of media coverage, despite not obtaining a live broadcast by network television.<sup>157</sup> Major television outlets and newspapers covered the concert heavily, both the planning and the actual concert. Unfortunately, not all the attention Farm Aid received from the media after the event was positive.

Farm Aid marched on. And with each year, national print media coverage waned. Noted anniversaries received a small uptick in coverage, but nowhere near the amount the first year garnered. Despite appearances by celebrities, politicians, and the musicians Farm Aid was still a popular event to attend, but not for national media outlets to cover.

#### **A. Associated Press**

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<sup>157</sup> Hall, "The Capital Farm Club" *Washington Post*, September 20, 1985.

The Associated Press covered Farm Aid more than any of the other media outlets throughout the 25 years. Similar to other news outlets, most of the Associated Press articles included announcements and reviews of the concerts. But where the Associated Press excelled, especially in the first three years, was providing hard numbers on profits of the concerts, the challenges posed for both the farming industry and Farm Aid, and where some of the money Farm Aid raised was donated to or used.<sup>158</sup>

The Associated Press was also the only news outlet in this study that reported on Farm Aid's financial activity.<sup>159</sup> One article was praiseworthy of Farm Aid's rating as a non-profit institution where 78% of the previous year's (2002) total budget went toward helping farmers (most watchdog groups recommend at least 65% of total budgets are designated for donations).<sup>160</sup> Just two years later, a study on the 2004 Farm Aid budget showed only 28% was given away.<sup>161</sup>

Coverage of Farm Aid began to wane after the 1990s because Farm Aid had declined in overall reach because of not having concerts every year and its messaging was still the same despite the farming industry not being a hot topic for media outlets. Most articles were simple

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<sup>158</sup> "Names in the News," Associated Press, September 3, 1985. Sharon Cohen, "FarmAid: A \$50 Million Barn Raising For America's Heartland," Associated Press, September 16, 1985. Bob Springer, "Nearly \$2 Million Raised Before Music Begun," Associated Press, September 19, 1985. "People In The News," Associated Press, October 26, 1985. "Most Farm Aid Tickets Unsold," Associated Press, June 19, 1986. Michael Holmes, "Benefit Concert Moving from UT Stadium," Associated Press, June 20, 1986. "Nelson Confident Concert Can Go On," Associated Press, June 24, 1986. "Insurance Problems Force Concert To Switch Sites Again," Associated Press, June 27, 1986. "Willie Nelson Organizes Second Farm Aid Concert," Associated Press, July 2, 1986. Michael Holmes, "Willie Nelson Urges 'Historical Day' for Farmers," Associated Press, July 4, 1986. Ken Herman, "Farm Aid II Donations Fall Short," Associated Press, July 5, 1986. "People in the News," Associated Press, September 13, 1986. Tony Kennedy, "Book Published With Farm Aid Money Critical of FDIC," Associated Press, April 18, 1987. Mike Robinson, "Willie Nelson Tells Senate Panel That Farmers 'Dropping Like Flies,'" Associated Press, June 18, 1987. Mike Robinson, "Willie Nelson Calls on Senators to Provide More Aid to Farmers," Associated Press, June 19, 1987. Ed Howard, "Farm Aid Sings Out For Agriculture," Associated Press, September 19, 1987. Ed Howard, "Farm Aid III Ends, Farm Movement Goes On," Associated Press, September 21, 1987. Ed Howard, "Farm Aid Starts Counting The Money," Associated Press, September 21, 1987.

<sup>159</sup> Craig Gustafson, "Farm Scene: Drought Turns Harvest Outlook Dismal for Many Minnesota Farmers," Associated Press, September 9, 2003. "Report: Farm Aid Donates Small Percentage of Funds," Associated Press, September 17, 2005.

<sup>160</sup> Gustafson, "Farm Scene," Associated Press, September 9, 2003.

<sup>161</sup> "Report: Farm Aid Donates Small Percentage of Funds," Associated Press, September 17, 2005.

concert announcements or reports on Nelson’s political activities unrelated to Farm Aid. In all of the concert announcement articles there were mentions of the first Farm Aid concert and the total gross from that concert.

Some Associated Press articles did note a shift in Farm Aid’s focus over the years as well as the organization’s renewed focus on organic food, food safety and educating on the origins of food, and connecting consumers with farmers.<sup>162</sup> Beginning in 2008, articles also mentioned the use of local and organic products that were being served at the annual concerts.<sup>163</sup> There were no mentions of the Homegrown Festival or the Good Food Movement.

## **B. Chicago Tribune**

Given that the first Farm Aid concert was held in Illinois, it should come as no surprise that the *Chicago Tribune* covered the concert heavily. From general details, to editorials both in support or chastising the concert, to reports on where the money raised was being distributed to, and articles criticizing Governor Thompson for taking on such a large role, the *Chicago Tribune* covered the first Farm Aid more than any other news outlet in this study.<sup>164</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* was the only outlet that reported on both the problem of not saying where the money raised would be distributed and what organizations would receive money after the concert.<sup>165</sup> Many articles quoted Farm Aid officials and politicians on the importance of not just raising money, but also raising awareness.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> “More than 23,000 turn out for 15<sup>th</sup> Farm Aid,” Associated Press, September 21, 2002. Geoff Mulvihill, “Farm Aid concert comes to a tough city,” Associated Press, September 24, 2006. Geoff Mulvihill, “Farm Aid goes from saving farms to promoting better food, health,” Associated Press, September 30, 2006.

<sup>163</sup> “Farm Aid to be held in New England for 1<sup>st</sup> time,” Associated Press, July 15, 2008.

<sup>164</sup> “Stars hop on bandwagon for ‘Farm Aid’ concert,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1985, 12. Franklin and Davis, “‘Farm Aid’ funds not yet allotted,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1985, 3. Sneed, Lavin, & O’Malley INC., “Music Aid,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1985, 12. “Plenty of blues for Farm Aid,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 1985, 8. “Nelson reveals plan for ‘Farm Aid’ funds,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 1985, 10.

<sup>165</sup> “Nelson reveals plan for ‘Farm Aid’ funds,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 1985, 10.

<sup>166</sup> “Stars hop on bandwagon for ‘Farm Aid’ concert,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1985, 12. Franklin and Davis, “‘Farm Aid’ funds not yet allotted,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1985, 3. Howard Witt, “Iowan’s hope Farm Aid’s

After the initial run of coverage, Farm Aid was relegated to articles announcing or reviewing the concerts and in some years, Farm Aid received no coverage at all. Few articles ran facts or details on where the money was allocated to (falling short of the coverage of the first Farm Aid). Even fewer articles mentioned politicians who were present at the event.<sup>167</sup> A small blurb was dedicated to Nelson and Mellencamp's congressional testimony in 1987, followed by an article two months later on the fading power celebrities had on members of Congress.<sup>168</sup> The Tribune was also the only news outlet to report on Farm Aid being too predictable and too white.<sup>169</sup>

By the mid-90s, Farm Aid's existence was also challenged by the paper. In articles that ran coinciding with the concert being moved to Illinois as a last-minute change, farmers were quoted as to questioning why Farm Aid was still around. They were unclear as to what really was the purpose of the organization.<sup>170</sup> Two weeks later a column ran providing figures and data that backed up why farmers were still struggling.<sup>171</sup>

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on the right track," *Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1985, 1. Tim Franklin, "Farm Aid cause has a tough row to hoe," *Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1985, 8. Tim Franklin, "Farm Aid politicking sprouts into rhubarb," *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1985, 1.

<sup>167</sup> "Fans roll out for Farm Aid refrain," *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1986, 18. "Nelson Kicks Off Farm Aid '96 Amid Positive Farming Trends," *Chicago Tribune*, July 23, 1996, accessed October, 20, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-10-13/news/9610130371\\_1\\_agricultural-exports-american-farmers-farm-aid](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-10-13/news/9610130371_1_agricultural-exports-american-farmers-farm-aid).

<sup>168</sup> Michael Killan, "North sure to read Micheneer's 'Legacy' to see how it all ends," *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1987, 16. "Stars losing some twinkle as advocates on Capitol Hill," *Chicago Tribune*, August 11, 1987, 12.

<sup>169</sup> Greg Kot, "Farm Aid Vi Suffers an Energy Drought," *Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 1993, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1993-04-26/news/9304260032\\_1\\_farm-aid-vi-cyclone-stadium-organizers](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1993-04-26/news/9304260032_1_farm-aid-vi-cyclone-stadium-organizers).

<sup>170</sup> T. Shawn Taylor, "Need For Farm Aid Remains, Organizers Say," *Chicago Tribune*, October 4, 1997, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-04/news/9710090046\\_1\\_american-farm-bureau-live-aid-new-world-music-theatre](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-04/news/9710090046_1_american-farm-bureau-live-aid-new-world-music-theatre).

<sup>171</sup> Renee Hunt, "Families Losing Out To Factory Farms," *Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 1997, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-17/news/9710170014\\_1\\_hog-farms-family-farms-farm-aid](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-17/news/9710170014_1_hog-farms-family-farms-farm-aid).

Beginning in 1998, the *Chicago Tribune* began reviewing the concert and including some of the various shifts in Farm Aid's focus on family farmers including factory farming and the exploitation of land.<sup>172</sup>

Coverage on Farm Aid didn't return to the *Chicago Tribune* until 2005 when Farm Aid held its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert in the Chicago area. Coverage included Farm Aid's weeklong series of events leading up to the concert including an education fair (which would later evolve into the Homegrown Festival) and a film festival.<sup>173</sup> Other articles mentioned Mayor Richard Daley and Senator Barack Obama's commitment to the event.<sup>174</sup>

The event was not without controversy. Three days before the concert, the Tribune ran a report on the poor ranking of Farm Aid for not giving away more of the money raised.<sup>175</sup> Three days later at the concert, Neil Young ripped up the *Chicago Tribune* at a press conference, said the *Chicago Tribune* hurt Farm Aid's reputation, and challenged the writers to note that Farm Aid does more than raise money – it provides services.<sup>176</sup> A rebuttal, authored by members of three Farm Coalition organizations, was published in the paper a week later coming to Farm Aid's defense and the organization's efforts.<sup>177</sup> Three days later the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that they stood by the article, despite a response from the executive director of

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<sup>172</sup> Joshua Klein, "New Blood Gives Growth To Farm Aid," *Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 1998, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1998-10-05/features/9810050069\\_1\\_farm-aid-factory-farming-new-world-music-theatre](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1998-10-05/features/9810050069_1_farm-aid-factory-farming-new-world-music-theatre).

<sup>173</sup> Greg Kot, "Farm Aid returns to Chicago to celebrate 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary," *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 2005, accessed 10/09/2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-07-11/features/0507110019\\_1\\_farm-aid-optimism-and-idealism-events-and-concerts](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-07-11/features/0507110019_1_farm-aid-optimism-and-idealism-events-and-concerts).

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. Jeff Zeleny, "Obama can't say no to Farm Aid invite," *Chicago Tribune*, September 14, 2005, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-14/news/0509140154\\_1\\_tweeter-center-kenny-chesney-illinois](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-14/news/0509140154_1_tweeter-center-kenny-chesney-illinois).

<sup>175</sup> Jason George, "Farm Aid expenses eat away donations," *Chicago Tribune*, September 17, 2005, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-17/news/0509170144\\_1\\_farm-aid-live-aid-family-farm](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-17/news/0509170144_1_farm-aid-live-aid-family-farm).

<sup>176</sup> Greg Kot, "Young comes to aid of Farm Aid," *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 2005, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-21/features/0509200304\\_1\\_aid-farmers-million-for-family-farms-charity](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-21/features/0509200304_1_aid-farmers-million-for-family-farms-charity).

<sup>177</sup> Ralph Paige, Katherine Ozer, Lorette Picciano, "Aid for the people who grow our food," *Chicago Tribune*, September 26, 2005, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-26/news/0509260006\\_1\\_farm-aid-family-farm-farm-crisis](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-26/news/0509260006_1_farm-aid-family-farm-farm-crisis).

Farm Aid Carolyn Mugar.<sup>178</sup> Five days later, another article by Mugar appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* criticizing the newspaper for not investigating further and making assumptions about Farm Aid’s grant program.<sup>179</sup> In the following years, only the 2010 concert received any coverage by the *Chicago Tribune* – and that was simply for announcing the concert just north of Chicago in Milwaukee.<sup>180</sup>

### C. New York Times

The *New York Times* dedicated significant coverage to the first Farm Aid. One writer embraced the concept of Farm Aid and discussed the implications and background behind the concert.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, it ran several columns on the previous charity rock concerts and whether people were growing tired of being solicited to. The paper also questioned whether Farm Aid could even compare to the other concerts and the problems given the challenging economic and political complications that led to the farm crisis in the first place.<sup>182</sup> The *New York Times* wrote articles two months after the first concert that reported where some of the money that Farm Aid raised was being distributed.<sup>183</sup> There were also instances of questioning as to what the correct protocol was for distributing the money that was raised.<sup>184</sup> Some articles featured farmers and leaders of various farmer organizations being critical of Farm Aid in

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<sup>178</sup> Don Wycliff, “Watching how money flows,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 2005, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-29/news/0509290035\\_1\\_carolyn-mugar-farm-aid-story](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-09-29/news/0509290035_1_carolyn-mugar-farm-aid-story).

<sup>179</sup> Carolyn Mugar, “Farm Aid’s efficiency and success,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 4, 2005, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-10-04/news/0510040020\\_1\\_farm-aid-family-farmers-benefit-concert](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-10-04/news/0510040020_1_farm-aid-family-farmers-benefit-concert).

<sup>180</sup> Greg Kot, “Farm Aid, SXSW set dates,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 2010 accessed October 9, 2012, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-08-03/features/ct-live-0803-farm-aid-sxsw-20100803\\_1\\_farm-aid-sxsw-southwest-music](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-08-03/features/ct-live-0803-farm-aid-sxsw-20100803_1_farm-aid-sxsw-southwest-music).

<sup>181</sup> Steven Greenhouse, “14-Hour Concert in Illinois Sept. 22 Will Seek \$50 Million to Help Farmers,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1985, 26.

<sup>182</sup> Jon Pareles, “Drums of Rock Music Beat for Different Causes,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1985, 11. Steve Schneider, “A New ‘Aid’ Concert Tests the Appeal of Charity,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1985, H28. “What Farm Aid Can’t Deliver,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1985, A18. Robert Palmer, “Rock Flexed Its Social And Political Muscles,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1985, H23.

<sup>183</sup> “Concert Money to Aid Farmers in 17 States,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1985, 26. “FarmAid Distributes \$900,000,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1985, 44.

<sup>184</sup> Greenhouse, “14-Hour Concert,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1985, 26.

thinking that a concert could solve the problem.<sup>185</sup> Their overall concern was that the concert could never replace how much farmers either had lost or were on the verge of losing. The editorials did counter with the argument that more people knew more about the farming crisis than ever before because of the concert.<sup>186</sup>

The following year, the *New York Times* covered the second Farm Aid concert and the organization's involvement with political activities outside of the annual concert. More news was bad news in this case. The physical location challenges, lack of liability insurance, and ticket sales didn't give Farm Aid the kind of positive media attention it attracted just a year earlier.<sup>187</sup> Other than a television announcement and a small review of the concert, Farm Aid failed to attract any coverage of the concert itself.<sup>188</sup>

Nelson and Mellencamp and their appearances on Capitol Hill received coverage in the *New York Times* in 1987.<sup>189</sup> However, rather than reporting on the testimony of Nelson and Mellencamp, the article questioned the importance of celebrities testifying before Congress. The article pointed out that these celebrity appearances were losing their appeal because so many of them were happening.<sup>190</sup> The article said that more clout was given to Nelson than other celebrity appearances because he championed the Farm Aid concert and has done something about the cause. A spokesman for the committee that Nelson and Mellencamp testified in front of said that members of Congress were much more apt at this point to hear from the farmers rather than celebrities.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>186</sup> "Farm Aid Benefit Concert Hailed as Arousing Public," *New York Times*, September 24, 1985, A18.

<sup>187</sup> "Lack of Insurance Imperils Farm Concert," *New York Times*, June 24, 1986, A16.

<sup>188</sup> Steve Schneider, "From Many Sources, Celebrations of the Country's Diversity," *New York Times*, June 29, 1986, H26. "Concert Draws 45,000," *New York Times*, July 5, 1986, 32.

<sup>189</sup> "The Novelty Seems To Be Wearing Off," *New York Times*, August 10, 1987, A16.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*



Outside of general concert announcements, Farm Aid received attention by the *New York Times* in 1992 and yet another criticism. In a review of Farm Aid V, the writer noted the lack of messaging consistent with Farm Aid's position during the concert. According to the writer, other than some images on stage and Mellencamp's three-song set, the reasoning behind Farm Aid wasn't properly communicated.<sup>192</sup> Additionally, the question was posed as to whether Farm Aid and its message were reaching a wide enough audience to make the impact it sought.<sup>193</sup>

In an article highlighting Farm Aid 15 and Nelson's experience as a farm advocate, even Nelson said he had become disenchanted with trying to persuade politicians to champion the cause with him.<sup>194</sup> He also conveyed that he recognizes how deep he was into his cause by highlighting how he wonders if Bono now realizes how difficult it is to champion causes. Nelson sympathetically pondered whether Bono ever wakes up and asks how he can out of this mess he got himself into (indicating Willie may have been disenchanted with his involvement in Farm Aid).<sup>195</sup>

The *New York Times* did eventually note Farm Aid's shift in focus and messaging. In a brief concert announcement for Farm Aid 20 in 2005, Nelson made the first indication on the importance of food and organic farming.<sup>196</sup> He also noted that people are interested now more than ever on where their food is coming from.<sup>197</sup> The following year, in a similar type of concert announcement, Farm Aid's new goals were highlighted including encouraging consumers to buy their food locally.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Karen Schoemer, "Farm Aid: Music Omits Message," *New York Times*, March 16, 1992, C11.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Elizabeth Becker, "Singer Keeps Focus on Farmers' Plight," *New York Times*, September 15, 2002, 22.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Lawrence Van Gelder, "Arts, Briefly," *New York Times*, July 13, 2005, E2.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Ben Sisarios, "Arts, Briefly," *New York Times*, July 8, 2006, B8.

In 2007, the *New York Times* covered Farm Aid heavily, mostly because the location of the concert that year was in New York City. Dubbed “Farm Aid: A Homegrown Festival,” much of the coverage focused on obtaining food from local sources rather than from the shelves of grocery stores (also known as the Good Food Movement).<sup>199</sup> The *New York Times* also highlighted Farm Aid’s shifting focus: the 1980s centered on saving mostly corn and bean farmers in high debt and on the verge of losing their land, the 1990s taking on the large agribusinesses that were pushing small family farmers off their land, and their new champion in the millennium – rallying behind the local food movement.<sup>200</sup> Also discussed at length was the new process of obtaining local food vendors for serving concessions at the 2007 concert, something the *New York Times* says was the first ever.<sup>201</sup> The newspaper said New York was selected as the location because the media coverage would bring renewed attention to the event.<sup>202</sup> After the 2007 concert, an article ran that featured one of Farm Aid’s advocates, author and chef Alice Waters, who was happy that the concert attempted to serve local food, but she quipped that the concert was still sponsored by big corporations including a national food service that provides concessions for many venues throughout the country.<sup>203</sup> Additional coverage of Farm Aid in the *New York Times* included small concert announcements for 2008, 2009, and 2010.<sup>204</sup>

#### **D. Rolling Stone**

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<sup>199</sup> Kim Severson, “On the Road to Farm Aid, The Long, Sweet Way,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2007, F5. Jon Pareles, “Next Stop...: Farm Aid,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2007, E1.

<sup>200</sup> Severson, “On the Road to Farm Aid,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2007, F5.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, F5. Pareles, “Next Stop...: Farm Aid,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2007, E1.

<sup>202</sup> Pareles, “Next Stop...: Farm Aid,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2007, E1.

<sup>203</sup> Kim Severson, “Lunch With a Food Revolutionary: Don’t Worry, She’ll Bring the Capers,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2007, F1.

<sup>204</sup> Kathryn Shattuck, “What’s On Today,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2008, B15. Nate Chinen, “Country Flavors, At Home In Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2009, C7. Mike Hale, “A Full Serving of Crime Fighters and Comedies,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2010, accessed March 24, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/12/arts/television/12tvlist.html>.

Given that no other music magazine had the influence or reach as *Rolling Stone*, one could expect a significant amount of Farm Aid coverage in the bi-monthly music magazine. The first Farm Aid concert did receive a lengthy review in *Rolling Stone*.<sup>205</sup> However, as the years went on, Farm Aid was relinquished to the small news briefs pages of the magazine reserved for concert announcements along with a few talking points.<sup>206</sup> Interestingly, Farm Aid anniversaries, the concert and organizations received significant space in the magazine. In those articles, there were mentions of the politicians and celebrities that attended, including then-Senator Barack Obama at the 2005 concert.<sup>207</sup> All the reviews for anniversary years were quite consistent – mention of all the artists, the songs they sang, the setting, and whether anyone mentioned anything about farming. Apart from a few quotes and statistics from Nelson, Young, Mellencamp, and Matthews, the magazine did not cover the event in-depth.

### **E. Washington Post**

The *Washington Post* initially covered Farm Aid heavily. During 1985, there were seven articles on Farm Aid (3 prior, 4 post and all were mostly in-depth articles on the event or Nelson and Mellencamp). The articles prior to the concert covered the logistics and background of the event, the political activities of Farm Aid’s organizers, and general information about the

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<sup>205</sup> “Farm Aid vs. Live Aid,” *Rolling Stone*, November, 7, 1985, 24.

<sup>206</sup> Jeff Giles and Chris Mundy, “News,” *Rolling Stone*, December 10, 1992, 39. Andrew Dansby, “Farm Aid Moves West: Matthews, Young, Nelson and Mellencamp ready for 2004 benefit,” *Rolling Stone*, August 2, 2004, accessed October 18, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/farm-aid-moves-west-20040802>. “Fall’s Big Benefit Shows,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2004, 38. Tracey Ford, “Dave Matthews, Neil Young Announce Farm Aid,” *Rolling Stone*, July 11, 2005, accessed October 18, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/dave-matthews-neil-young-announce-farm-aid-20050711>. Lauren Gitlin, Shirley Halperin, Brian Hiatt, Gillian Telling, “Barack Rocks Farm Aid,” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2005, 32. “Farm Aid Rocks the Big Apple,” *Rolling Stone*, October 4, 2007, 11. Daniel Kreps, “Mellencamp, Young, and Matthews Bring Farm Aid to New England,” *Rolling Stone*, July 15, 2008, accessed October 18, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/mellencamp-young-and-matthews-bring-farm-aid-to-new-england-20080715>. Andy Greene, “Neil Young, Mellencamp, Willie Rock Boston Farm Aid,” *Rolling Stone*, October 16, 2008, 12. Young, Mellencamp, Matthews and Nelson Set for St. Louis Farm Aid,” *Rolling Stone*, July 16, 2009, accessed October 18, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/mellencamp-young-and-matthews-bring-farm-aid-to-new-england-20080715>. “In Brief,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2010, 32.

<sup>207</sup> Lauren Gitlin, Shirley Halperin, Brian Hiatt, Gillian Telling, “Barack Rocks Farm Aid,” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2005, 32.

farming industry at the time. However, after the event the *Washington Post* gave an in-depth review of the concert that, in general, raved about the concert, praised the organizers for pulling off such a large event despite the challenging logistics behind it, and the preliminary success of the money that the concert raised – despite it falling short of the goal. However, two days after the event, the Post published an op-ed that chastised the philanthropic concert industry, Live Aid and Farm Aid specifically, for trying to solve political problems with music.<sup>208</sup> The very next day the newspaper reported that Farm Aid did, in fact, only raise a fifth of what was originally intended.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, the article contained an interview with a representative of the Illinois Farm Bureau who was very critical of Farm Aid and the politicking the artists did at the event (Farm Aid originally promised no politicking would take place, but some of the artists chose to voice their opinions).<sup>210</sup> The bottom line is that Live Aid was successful because it relied on a set of images that gave the viewer an idea of the dire circumstances in Africa. Images of gaunt and starving children pulled at the heartstrings of the viewer; images of farmland or farmers did not.<sup>211</sup>

The following year Farm Aid saw seven mentions in the *Washington Post*. Not one article was dedicated to the concert itself. Most were focused on Nelson and his plans for the second Farm Aid concert and how the location for it had to change twice because of the cost of insurance premiums and ticket sales coming in under expectations. There was one small review/criticism of the second concert as well – mostly about the actual lineup playing too short of a set.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Richard Cohen, “Concerts Won’t Do the Job,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 1985, A21.

<sup>209</sup> Richard Harrington, “Farm Aid Reaps Less Than Projected,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 1985, D1.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, D1.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, D1.

<sup>212</sup> Richard Harrington, “On the Beat; Where Dylan Went to Listen,” *Washington Post*, July 9, 1986, B7.

The *Washington Post* covered Farm Aid four times in 1987. One was an announcement, another a lengthy article on Willie Nelson and his career. The other two articles focused solely on Nelson and Mellencamp's appearance on Capitol Hill. The article, however, focused more on the coverage of the celebrity appearances and the amount of media personnel in attendance than the substance behind the bill or Farm Aid.<sup>213</sup> The other article covered Nelson and Mellencamp's appearance on Capitol Hill, but also Nelson's dinner with members of Congress and the Speaker of the House Jim Wright.<sup>214</sup>

The following years through 2010 saw very minimal coverage on Farm Aid. Some years (1991, 1992, 2001, 2002, and 2003) received no coverage at all. Most other years featured small announcements about the upcoming concert or small mentions in promotional pieces for either Nelson or Mellencamp's new albums.

One article from 1998 does stand out, though. In a scathing op-ed response to the previous week's editorial that criticized Nelson, Young, and Mellencamp, Carolyn Mugar, Executive Director of Farm Aid, penned her position on citizen's rights for weighing in on the newly proposed USDA guidelines on what constitutes organic food.<sup>215</sup> Mugar also chastised the paper for concluding that Nelson, Young, and Mellencamp lacked the credibility to be commenting on family farms and organic family farms. Mugar quipped back that 84 percent of organic farms were family farms and that those artists had more than ten years of experience advocating for the family farmer.<sup>216</sup> The *Washington Post* did not print a rebuttal.

## **RQ 2: How has Farm Aid impacted policy?**

### **II. Impact on Policy**

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<sup>213</sup> Ward Sinclair, "Country Duo Seeks Responsive Chord," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1987, A23.

<sup>214</sup> Richard Harrington, "Willie Nelson, On the Hill Again; The Country Legend, From Outlaw To Crusader For The Family Farm," *Washington Post*, July 4, 1987, D1.

<sup>215</sup> Carolyn Mugar, "The Farmers' Friends," *Washington Post*, May 9, 1998, A13.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, A13.

## **A. Mission**

Initially, Farm Aid's organizers wanted the event to act as a catalyst to raise money that would be used to prevent farmers from losing their land and to create awareness of the plight of the family farm.<sup>217</sup> However, over the course of time, Farm Aid changed its focus. Its mission is no longer solely concentrated on raising awareness and changing public policy. Rather, Farm Aid's mission has evolved into a simple, encompassing statement: keep family farmers on their land and in business.<sup>218</sup> Farm Aid serves its mission by focusing on four categories: promoting food from family farms, growing the Good Food Movement, helping farmers thrive, and taking action to change the system.<sup>219</sup>

## **B. Policy**

Farm Aid's initial goal in 1985 was to raise \$50 million in donations to distribute to farmers who were in financial trouble. Organizers hoped that if enough money was raised, awareness of the shrinking family farmer industry would be at an all-time high and the public would pressure policymakers to introduce legislation to ease the burden on the small family farmer. Unfortunately, the goal did not materialize and Farm Aid organizers were forced to either abandon the cause completely or continue to advocate for the family farmer. They chose the latter.

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<sup>217</sup> Anderson, "Farm Aid: A Fantasy Theme Analysis," 3. Garofalo, "Making Music/Making Bread," 3.

<sup>218</sup> "A Bit About Us: About Us," Farm Aid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm).

<sup>219</sup> "Good food from family farmers helps you and helps farmers. Getting food directly from farmers at farmers markets or through community-support agriculture (CSAs) puts your dollars directly into the hands of family farmers and you receive the best quality food. But for more family farmers to thrive, we must get the food that they grow into urban neighborhoods, grocery stores, restaurants and schools." "All About Good Food: Good Food," Farm Aid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723849/k.F173/Good\\_Food.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723849/k.F173/Good_Food.htm). "For 25 years, Farm Aid has answered 1-800-FARM-AID to provide immediate and effective support services to farm families in crisis." "A Bit About Us: About Us," FarmAid, accessed March 24, 2011, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm).

Farm Aid has advocated for changes in policy, but the goal was always to raise awareness and money. Executive Director Carolyn Mugar says that Farm Aid's biggest achievements are hard to measure.<sup>220</sup> Rather, Farm Aid staff members see the organization as facilitators of communication rather than policy changers.<sup>221</sup> Farm Aid staff want to convey the impact the corporate farm industry has on families. Farm Aid relies on its reach on its website and social media sites to either convey policy support or challenge proposals before government bodies. Despite advocating for numerous farming policies, there is difficulty in measuring the success Farm Aid has had other than conveying that message. Mugar thinks Farm Aid has had a lot to do with raising the public's consciousness on farmers and food. She also credits the board, specifically Nelson, Mellencamp, Young and Matthews for not wavering in communicating and advocating for Farm Aid's message.<sup>222</sup>

### **C. Political Action & Policymaker Involvement**

In its infancy, Farm Aid's goal was to drum up enough support from the public for policy makers to create and pass legislation that was more conducive to the family farmer. Farm Aid organizers wanted policy to change; change that would be a catalyst to help family farmers remain on their land and prosper. As noted earlier, there was a significant farming crisis in 1985. Family farmers were losing profits and, ultimately, their land. Some of this was a result of farming policy that favored big business and factory farms more than the smaller family farm.

The first Farm Aid might not have happened if not for the help of then-Illinois Governor Jim Thompson. Thompson helped determine where the first concert would be held as well as put preliminary plans in place while golfing with Nelson. Thompson became a spokesperson for

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<sup>220</sup> Carolyn Mugar (Executive Director, Farm Aid), interviewed by Andrew M. Palen via telephone, Milwaukee, WI, April 10, 2012.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

Farm Aid and the goals of the organization. Wherever Nelson was quoted, Thompson was not far behind. Despite Thompson's intentions, the press noticed his involvement and began to question whether his intentions were truly in the farmers' best interests or whether he was attempting to earn points with the local farming industry. Thompson was up for re-election the following year.<sup>223</sup>

Three days prior to the first Farm Aid concert, Nelson and Young had a meeting on Capitol Hill with the Senate Agriculture Committee to talk about the farming crisis.<sup>224</sup> Nelson wanted his appearance alone to be enough to convince Congress to bring attention to the farming industry.<sup>225</sup> No action was taken as the result of Nelson and Young's appearance.

More than two years later, a congressional hearing on the status of farming programs took place in early summer of 1987.<sup>226</sup> Over four days, the Subcommittee on Agricultural Productions and Stabilization of Prices of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry heard testimony from several politicians including U.S. Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa, a Farm Aid supporter from the onset, U.S. Senator Tom Daschle from South Dakota, and Farm Aid co-founders Willie Nelson and John Mellencamp. Nelson and Mellencamp were not only advocating for the family farm, but for Farm Aid in general. Included in Nelson and Mellencamp's testimonies was an addendum that included all the statewide organizations Farm Aid either contributed to or provided support for.

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<sup>223</sup> Tim Franklin and Robert Davis, "'Farm Aid' funds not yet allotted," *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1985, 3. Sneed, Lavin, & O'Malley INC., "Music Aid," *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1985, 12. Steve Neal and Tim Franklin, "Star-studded Farm Aid slow with cash harvest," *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1985, 1.

<sup>224</sup> Carla Hall, "The Capital Farm Club; Nelson & Young Take Their Pleas to the Hill," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1985.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Subcommittee on Agricultural Production and Stabilization of Prices. *Series of Hearings Dealing with the Farm Program and Various Phases of the Farm Program and S. 658, The Family Farm Act*. 100<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1987. S. Rep. 45-129.



Senators Harkin and Daschle both stated that the farming industry was not only an agricultural issue but also a sociological issue. Comparisons were drawn between having a strong military force and an affordable and reliable food supply and how both were in the nation's best interest.<sup>227</sup> The food processing industry also drew heavy criticism from the senators with claims that the industry was making large profits while squeezing out the small family farmer.<sup>228</sup>

Before Nelson and Mellencamp spoke, Senator Harkin introduced them and prefaced their remarks by commenting that if it were not for Farm Aid, there would have been more divorces, suicides, and challenges for farmers in Iowa.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, Harkin claimed that his office had reached out to Farm Aid in the past year quite often to obtain guidance and help for those farmers who were in often dire and serious situations.<sup>230</sup>

With that, both Nelson and Mellencamp read prepared statements for the committee. Nelson's statement was brief. Rather than claim he knew everything about farming policy, he turned to the committee members and challenged them on the length of time it has taken to get help for the farmer. Nelson wasn't there to advocate for any bill in particular. Rather, he made a plea to make something happen and make it happen fast.<sup>231</sup>

Mellencamp then took to the microphone and explained that he thought there were instances of famers being bad managers, which resulted in the loss of their farm. However, he claimed that he found it hard to believe that that was the case for so many family farms. Mellencamp also made the criticism, and poked fun at the fact, that farmers were coming to singers for help rather than their legislators. Mellencamp found it sad that these farmers had nowhere else to go. He then closed his statement by challenging the legislators on the committee

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 76.

to do what was morally right for the American people, because that was what they were elected to do.<sup>232</sup>

The appearances by Nelson and Mellencamp were certainly well received, but perhaps not for the reasons they sought. The transcript from the session indicates the senators were more in awe of the two popular musicians for simply appearing before the committee than what they were appearing for. Two senators remarked that they were big fans of Nelson and Mellencamp. Despite their testimony, the musicians' appeal seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. No direct action was taken after the subcommittee hearing on the farming industry.

The first Farm Aid occurred during a year when farmers and farm policy were often mentioned in the media. Nelson and Farm Aid organizers took up the cause at the right time. The topic was a hotbed for media coverage. After the initial buzz in 1985, Nelson and other Farm Aid organizers weren't being called on as much from national policymakers. In 1986 Farm Aid gave a \$250,000 grant to the United Farmer and Rancher Congress to put together a coalition convention aimed at altering Reagan-administration farm policies.<sup>233</sup> No political dignitaries were present at the convention except for the Rev. Jesse Jackson.<sup>234</sup>

In 1993, Nelson was again called to testify, this time to the U.S. House Agriculture Subcommittee on Department Operations and Nutrition, just two days shy of Farm Aid VI. Nelson's prepared statement echoed similar statements he made six years earlier when testifying. However, this time the nation was in a recession and Nelson pleaded with the subcommittee to fix the backbone of the country. Nelson plainly argued that when farmers are making money, so is

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>233</sup> William Robbins, "Farmers Urged to Seek Change in U.S. Policy," *New York Times*, September 13, 1986.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

the country.<sup>235</sup> The subcommittee had convened to accept testimony on different ways farmers and other activists thought the U.S. Department of Agriculture could be streamlined.<sup>236</sup>

Nelson, and Farm Aid, soldiered on obtaining some political allies along the way. Throughout Farm Aid's first 25 years, various politicians would make appearances at Farm Aid to express their support – either through prepared speeches, jumping on stage and playing with a band, or just being present.<sup>237</sup> Despite appearances and involvement being difficult to actually measure, Farm Aid Executive Director Carolyn Mugar felt that the policymakers were elected and are respected, their opinions mattered, and they could have helped fight lobbyists who were representing the large corporate farming industry.<sup>238</sup>

### **RQ 3: How has Farm Aid evolved?**

#### **A. How has Farm Aid been able to maintain its longevity?**

### **III. Evolution**

#### **A. Social Movement & Messaging**

##### **1. Grassroots**

After falling short of its initial goals, Farm Aid remained steadfast in its messaging though its first five years. Slowly, though, Farm Aid's organizers began to modify its messaging. By the fifth Farm Aid concert in 1990, farmers were joined by environmental activists and consumer advocates in addition to the musicians and politicians. Farm Aid's message shifted from "save the farm" to one that centered on how farmers are the caretakers of our land – the very food we feed our families is dependent on family farms. The message went from asking

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<sup>235</sup> Steven P. Rosenfeld, "Nelson: Farm 'Backbone' of Country is Broken," Associated Press, April 23, 1993.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Some noted appearances include: Pat Buchanan, Ralph Nader, Governor Jim Thompson, Senator Tom Harkin, Senator Russ Feingold, Roger Clinton, and Senator Barack Obama

<sup>238</sup> Mugar, interviewed by Andrew M. Palen, April 10, 2012.

concert viewers for their sympathy for the family farmer to one of identification.<sup>239</sup> Family farmers were now the key to good health. The health system is reliant on food – food that is cultivated from family farms, not factory farms. Suddenly Farm Aid was asking people to invest in the cause for not only the health of the family farm industry, but for the health of their own families.

Farm Aid organizers began taking steps to educate the public on how factory farms were not only putting family farmers out of business, but were creating food that was not healthy for the general public. Slowly, Farm Aid messaging became one that insinuated factory farms were part of a public health crisis. Farm Aid moved into an advocacy and consumer activist campaign – one that aimed to engage its potential supporters by critiquing farm policy and pointing out the benefits that policy had on large factory farms, but how it also threatened small family farmers.

In 2007 Farm Aid organizers realized that it didn't make much sense to advocate for family farms and not take advantage of the opportunity to educate concert attendees on the importance of not only family farms but taking care of the environment. Organizers pooled together local businesses and non-profits that either helped family farmers or were environmental advocates to form a small village at each concert. Known as the Homegrown Village, this area of the concert venue provided an opportunity for concert attendees to get an understanding of the various farming and energy efforts going on in their own communities. Demonstrations from alternative energy and fuel to utilizing water as a means to powering vehicles to soil cultivation were just a few of the topics at the Homegrown Village. The aim of the village was to educate concertgoers on local initiatives and motivate them to get involved.

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<sup>239</sup> Eileen E. Schell, "The Rhetorics of the Farm Crisis: Toward Alternative Agrarian Literacies in a Globalized World," in *Rural Literacies*, Kim Donehower, et al. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 100.

In addition to the Homegrown Village, Farm Aid organizers also changed the type of food available at the concerts. Rather than have the concessions come from the venue's typical vendors (which, generally, consist of pre-packaged and highly processed foods), organizers reached out to food sources, including local farmers, that could provide healthy, organic and sustainable food at a moderate price. In hindsight, serving processed food at an event that is promoting good, healthy and local food is contradictory in of itself. Unfortunately, it took organizers until 1999 to figure that out.<sup>240</sup>

In the mid-2000s, food education – where food comes from – began to take hold in culture. With the expansion of farmer's markets, various natural food stores such as Whole Foods, and social media, Farm Aid was able to harness this new grassroots movement for further advocacy. Farm Aid hung around long enough to be a part of a cultural movement – a movement that remains powerful to this day. Advocating for healthy food from clean and environmentally friendly sources is more popular than ever. Farm Aid is attached to that movement and its messaging about good food reflects that.

## **2. Internet & Social Media**

Farm Aid's online presence began with its website [www.farmaid.org](http://www.farmaid.org). The first website post was the announcement of Farm Aid '98 on February 8, 1998.<sup>241</sup> As technology progressed, Farm Aid began to include other information on its website besides concert information, general history, and philanthropic efforts.

Slowly the Farm Aid site began to include pieces of the organization's history. From the concert's inception to phone numbers to donate to help the family farmer. By 2007, however, the

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<sup>240</sup> Thom Duffy, "10 Reasons Why Willie Nelson's Farm Aid Is Unlike Any Other Music Festival," *Billboard*, September 18, 2016, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/live/7511254/willie-nelson-farm-aid-unlike-any-other-music-festival>.

<sup>241</sup> "Farm Aid Announces First Ever Return Engagement As Benefit Concert Goes Back To Chicago In October," accessed April 25, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/19990208210643/http://www.farmaid.org/farmaid/>.

website became more of an activist site. With the recent introduction of the Homegrown Village, organizers of the site began to include pieces on farming education, small family farmer stories that the organization had helped financially, press releases from its board of directors advocating for legislation, and previous concert dates. By 2010, the Farm Aid website included its previous year expenditures, a new blog that was inspired by the Good Food Movement, videos of previous concert performances, merchandise, a live stream of the annual concert, and political statements such as the promotion for the passing of bills that helped the farmer and curtailed financial benefits for factory farms.<sup>242</sup>

Farm Aid entered the world of social media in 2008 when organizers opened Twitter (July) and Facebook (September) accounts. In 2008 social media was uncharted territory for many business and public philanthropic organizations. Companies had not yet begun to employ social media content creators. Given the little experience with social media most had, it should come as no surprise to note that Farm Aid's first Facebook post was in response to a fan about a ticketing question. Farm Aid's first post on anything advocacy related wasn't until almost seven months later. Slowly as social media grew by storm, posts on the Farm Aid channels began to advocate more for farmers and policy proposals as well as post photos and videos from previous Farm Aid concerts. It is interesting to note that despite the organization's heavy promotion of its social media channels, the official Farm Aid page had slightly more than 100,000 likes on Facebook and 28,000 followers on Twitter as of October 2015.<sup>243</sup> One could expect a larger social media following on Farm Aid given the organizations history, longevity, and association with popular musicians.

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<sup>242</sup> Farm Aid, <https://www.farmaid.org/>, accessed April 16, 2012.

<sup>243</sup> Farm Aid, <https://www.facebook.com/FarmAid/> accessed June 4, 2015. Farm Aid, <https://twitter.com/farmaid>, accessed June 4, 2015.

Farm Aid now uses its social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) to promote concerts, re-post concert clips, advocate for special political causes, urge followers to sign petitions to support those political causes, post messages from Nelson or the other members of Farm Aid, publicize biographies of farmers that Farm Aid has helped throughout the years, and generate buzz among its followers.

## **B. Products**

When the first Farm Aid concert took place, organizers thought it would be a one-time only concert. When the original Farm Aid did not meet financial expectations, they decided to continue with an annual concert. As people continued to attend the annual concerts, and watch the various television broadcasts, so did the opportunity to capitalize financially on merchandise and products that were related to the concert.

### **1. Concert Broadcasts**

Farm Aid has relied on money raised through not only concert attendances, but from more on people viewing at home. After all, a concert cannot raise \$50 million on attendance alone. The initial Farm Aid concert was broadcast live on The Nashville Network (TNN) as well on syndicated networks during a primetime three-hour live special. No major network ran the full concert.<sup>244</sup> Throughout the broadcast, a toll-free number was prominently displayed on the bottom of the screen to elicit viewers to call and donate. The toll-free donation number was displayed for each of Farm Aid's subsequent broadcasts. Voice of America also transmitted some performances to listeners overseas.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Hall, "The Capital Farm Club," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1985.

<sup>245</sup> Michael Holmes, "Nelson Hosts Second Concert For Farmers," Associated Press, July 4, 1986.

The following year Farm Aid II was held in Texas. VH-1, a music video channel aimed at adults, broadcast the concert in its entirety.<sup>246</sup> Despite the largest roster of performers in Farm Aid history, in addition to two acts performing via satellite, organizers of the concert could not obtain prime time coverage of the concert similar to the previous year.

The Nashville Network was brought back to broadcast Farm Aid III in 1987. In addition to the broadcast, Dick Clark Productions aired a two-hour primetime special of the concert on three dozen television stations throughout the US.<sup>247</sup> Farm IV was not only broadcast in its entirety on TNN, but CBS also broadcast a two-hour highlight special that night.<sup>248</sup>

The concerts were broadcast by TNN until 1997. Beginning in 1997, Country Music Television (CMT) took over the reins. Considering the consistency of the concert having both rock and country artists, having CMT broadcast the concerts created the potential for a new audience and revenue stream. The partnership lasted for six years.<sup>249</sup>

In 2003, a two-hour version of Farm Aid '03 aired during prime time on the concert series Soundstage on PBS. For the next several years, Farm Aid charged viewers to watch the live concert stream. Consumers were asked to purchase a license for a minimum \$10 donation to watch the entire concert online.<sup>250</sup> For Farm Aid's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005, in addition to the live webcast, the concert was also available a month after it was held on pay-per-view and on

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<sup>246</sup> Hoekstra, "Two Decades of Farm Aid Concerts," 71. "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm).

<sup>247</sup> Dennis McDougal, "Willie Nelson's Farm Aid III Being Held In Nebraska Today," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1987, accessed June 22, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-09-19/news/mn-2242\\_1\\_farm-aid](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-09-19/news/mn-2242_1_farm-aid).

<sup>248</sup> "Past Farm Aid Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed July 3, 2015, <http://www.farmaid.org/concert/past-farm-aid-concerts/>.

<sup>249</sup> R. Thomas Umstead, "CMT to Air Farm Aid Concert," accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.multichannel.com/news/orphan-articles/cmt-air-farm-aid-concert/156839>

<sup>250</sup> "Musicians Gathering for Farm Aid This Weekend," CMT, accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.cmt.com/news/1491052/musicians-gathering-for-farm-aid-this-weekend/>.



InDemand.<sup>251</sup> Beginning in 2006, Farm Aid was also available on XM Satellite Radio for paid subscribers.<sup>252</sup>

In 2008 Farm Aid entered into a new television broadcast partnership with DirectTV. From 2008 until 2010, Farm Aid was broadcast on DirectTV HD, Sirius XM radio and a webcast on the Farm Aid website.<sup>253</sup> The concert is now solely broadcast on Farm Aid's YouTube channel for free and Willie Nelson's Sirius XM radio station.

## **2. Video Releases**

Despite Farm Aid's consistent television and web presence, the organization has failed to capitalize on generating additional revenue from a multitude of home video releases. In particular, the inaugural Farm Aid concert could have generated a significant amount of money from a home video release since concert attendance was high, syndication guaranteed higher television viewership and the concert generated roughly \$10 million – more than any other Farm Aid concert to date.

There have been a few select home video releases. However, the first wasn't until 2001 – sixteen years after the first Farm Aid concert. However, the 2001 Farm Aid was more than just a Farm Aid concert. Held less than three weeks after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the concert took on a very patriotic theme. Dubbed the "Concert for America," the abridged concert release featured songs that focused on patriotic themes that were performed that night by the artists. Farm Aid released two more concerts on home video: the 2003 concert, which aired on

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<sup>251</sup> Cissy Bowman, "Farm Aid 2005: Supporting Family Farms and Organics," Cooperative Grocer, accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.cooperativegrocer.coop/articles/2009-01-21/farm-aid-2005>.

<sup>252</sup> "Farm Aid 2006 Presented By Silk Soymilk To Be Webcast Live," NBC 13 WREX, accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.wrex.com/story/5467442/farm-aid-2006-presented-by-silk-soymilk-to-be-webcast-live>.

<sup>253</sup> "How To Watch The Concert Live," Farm Aid, accessed June 22, 2014, <https://www.farmaid.org/blog/how-to-watch-the-concert-live/>.

Soundstage on PBS, and the 2005 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert. Both releases featured performance highlights of each concert.

Since 2005, Farm Aid has not released a concert on home video. However, since 2010, Farm Aid's YouTube channel has featured full performances of each artist from the concert year.<sup>254</sup> The channel now has many previous performances of artists dating back to the very first Farm Aid.

### 3. Audio Releases

Similar to home video releases, Farm Aid has not capitalized on any audio releases of full concerts. News releases in 1985 indicated the artists from the concert would record an album to raise money for farmers (similar to the "We Are The World" single earlier in 1985), but that failed to materialize. Plans for a video and live concert album of the first Farm Aid also did not come to fruition.<sup>255</sup> A press release from September 1999 indicated that Farm Aid, in partnership with Best Buy (one of the concert's sponsors that year), would release two audio releases and a DVD of concert footage.<sup>256</sup> However, that also did not happen. Farm Aid did release a live compilation album in 2000 that featured performances of various artists from Farm Aid II to Farm Aid '99. Titled "Farm Aid: Keep America Growing Volume 1," all proceeds were used to aid American farmers.<sup>257</sup> The "Volume 1" title implied that more recordings would be released, but, to date, there have not been any further audio releases. It should be noted that both audio and video releases may have been stymied due to the challenging and costly nature of obtaining licensing and copyright releases for large concerts.

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<sup>254</sup> Farm Aid, <https://www.youtube.com/user/farmaid>, accessed June 4, 2015.

<sup>255</sup> "Names in the News," Associated Press, August 17, 1985.

<sup>256</sup> "Farm Aid and Best Buy to Produce First-Ever Concert CDs and DVD," *The Free Library*, September 9, 1999, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Farm+Aid+and+Best+Buy+to+Produce+First-Ever+Concert+CDs+and+DVD.-a055700307>.

<sup>257</sup> "Farm Aid CD Compiles Eclectic Moments," CMT, September 11, 2003, accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.cmt.com/news/1478101/farm-aid-cd-compiles-eclectic-moments/>.

#### **4. Merchandise Sales**

Farm Aid has offered merchandise/souvenirs at its concerts since their inception. What started as a few Farm Aid branded headbands and concert lineup t-shirts has turned into a bigger source of revenue. Farm Aid began to capitalize on the grassroots style of campaign that the organization identifies with. The small family farmer standing up to the larger factory farms instills imagery of the underdog staying in the fight until the end. One shirt displays the silhouettes of a farmer doing a karate kick into a donkey. Above the image is the word Farmers. The pictures along with the verbiage lead the reader to conclude the message stating “Farmers Kick Ass.”<sup>258</sup>

Beginning in the 2000s Farm Aid began to offer merchandise that was available for purchase at the concerts on its website. Farm Aid also began to sell limited edition pieces as well – including autographed posters, designer jewelry and vintage merchandise from previous concerts. Farm Aid was exploiting every possible avenue to generate additional revenue.

#### **C. Sponsorships & Controversy**

Farm Aid’s history of sponsorships is rather unique. On Farm Aid’s website, the first mention of any corporate sponsorship Farm Aid obtained was in 1991 with Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream. However, Ben and Jerry’s was certainly not the first corporate sponsor of Farm Aid. In fact, eight companies sponsored the very first Farm Aid concert. In an unusual circumstance, instead of sponsors being secured by promoters, a typical industry standard, a communications group (Group W Satellite Communications) that represented The Nashville Network was charged with finding sponsors. Those sponsors were brought aboard to help offset the production of the concert in exchange for media spots during the concert on both television and radio, venue

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<sup>258</sup> Farm Aid Store, Farm Aid, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://shop.farmaid.org/collections/>.

signage, VIP tickets and product displays.<sup>259</sup> The twelve sponsors of Farm Aid were: Campbell's Soups, Miller Brewing Company, U.S. Tobacco, Sears and Roebuck, Fram Oil Filters, The Dairy Board, Hershey's, Younkers, Duracell Batteries, Quaker Oats, Tyson Foods, and Chevrolet.<sup>260</sup>

Don Tyson, CEO of food processing company Tyson Foods and a close friend of Willie Nelson, made sure to take advantage of his company's sponsorship.<sup>261</sup> Not only did Tyson Foods underwrite some of Farm Aid's costs, the company shipped in chicken nuggets by the truckload for the musicians and crews.<sup>262</sup> Farm Aid's partnership with Tyson Foods lasted until the third Farm Aid concert before organizers realized the very farmers they were trying to save were being pushed out of their industry by large food processing companies and factory farms.<sup>263</sup> Ironically, in 2015 Farm Aid published three stories about the negative impact that Tyson Foods had on three family farmers who were contract farmers for the company.<sup>264</sup>

Rather than only focusing on sponsoring the annual concert, Younkers decided on a different approach. In partnership with Iowa State University, South Dakota State University and University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Younkers created the Farm Aid Agricultural Scholarship Trust program. The program was intended to provide scholarship funds to students who were

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<sup>259</sup> Hillary Clay Hicks, "Live Aid, Farm Aid, Hands Across America: Super-Events and Mega-Audiences," *Billboard*, April 26, 1986 accessed July 27, 2015,

<https://books.google.com/books?id=LCQEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA57&lpg=PA57&dq=farm+aid+sponsors&source=bl&ots=aw9yshfqhI&sig=GckctCGS8Gdl4dZgAaRwLhYAImc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CEoQ6AEwCDgKahUKEwjSpNHR9NvGAhWKFJIKHUEuAE4#v=onepage&q=farm%20aid%20sponsors&f=false>.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. Younkers to Sponsor Scholarship," *Daily Reporter*, November 13, 1987 accessed July 27, 2015

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1926&dat=19871113&id=ilkrAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=49gEAAAIAIBAJ&pg=3034,4437352&hl=en>.

Dollar Amounts of Sponsorships/Donations - Campbell's Soups: \$500,000, Chevrolet: \$500,000, Miller Brewing Company: \$300,000, Sears, Roebuck and Co.: \$225,000, Quaker Oats Co.: \$100,000, Fram Oil Filters: \$100,000, Duracell Co.: \$100,000. Bob Springer, "Nearly \$2 Million Raised Before Music Begun," Associated Press, September 19, 1985.

<sup>261</sup> Sharon Cohen, "FarmAid: A \$50 Million Barn Raising For America's Heartland," Associated Press, September 16, 1985.

<sup>262</sup> Cohen, "FarmAid: A \$50 Million Barn Raising," Associated Press, September 16, 1985.

<sup>263</sup> Michael Hamad, "Music: Farm Aid Comes to the Capital Region," *timesunion*, September 6, 2013, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://blog.timesunion.com/explore/music-farm-aid-comes-to-the-capital-region/934/>

<sup>264</sup> "Life Under Contract: Poultry Farming in Arkansas," Farm Aid, May 18, 2015, accessed July 27, 2015, <https://www.farmaid.org/blog/farmer-heroes/life-under-contract-poultry-farming-in-arkansas/>.

studying agriculture and similar fields.<sup>265</sup> In its first year, the funds were established from one week's of retail sales at Younkers stores.<sup>266</sup> Years after, scholarship funds were raised from promotions within the store.<sup>267</sup> By the end of 2014, the scholarship had \$457,892 in available funds.<sup>268</sup> The scholarship is still available (2015), but students must both come from a family farm and attend Iowa State University only.<sup>269</sup> Scholarships are awarded on a yearly basis.

The Texas Agricultural Department, despite not contributing monetarily to the concert or its production costs, sponsored Farm Aid II.<sup>270</sup> However, it was more of a formality for obtaining the use of Memorial Stadium at the University of Texas. Unfortunately, the concert ended up not being held at the stadium because of insurance liabilities and was moved to a location near Dallas.

In 1991, Farm Aid entered into its first sponsorship and partnership that would continue for many years: Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream. The grass-roots ice cream company became known for speaking out against having any added preservatives or growth hormones in its products. That year, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream shipped 8 million pints of ice cream with "Support Family Farmers" and "Support Farm Aid" labels on its packaging.<sup>271</sup> Since then, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream has been a leading sponsor of Farm Aid. In 2007, Ben & Jerry's introduced a new flavor:

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<sup>265</sup> "Over 107 College Scholarships," *Daily Reporter*, November 12, 1988, accessed July 27, 2015, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1907&dat=19881112&id=XWArAAAIBAJ&sjid=-dkEAAAIBAJ&pg=6026,4443489&hl=en>.

<sup>266</sup> Younkers to Sponsor Scholarship," *Daily Reporter*, November 13, 1987.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> "Farm Aid Financial Statements 2013-2014," Han Group, June 26, 2015, accessed July 27, 2015 [https://1efnyhsj63r2fo5g01erbmcv-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/farm\\_aid-financial\\_statements-2014-2013.pdf](https://1efnyhsj63r2fo5g01erbmcv-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/farm_aid-financial_statements-2014-2013.pdf).

<sup>269</sup> A committee appointed by Younkers allocates 5% of its fund each year for scholarships. The rest of the money is carry-forward. "Farm Aid Financial Statements 2013-2014," Han Group, June 26, 2015. "Younkers Farm Aid Scholarships," Iowa State University, accessed July 27, 2015, <https://www.scholarships.cals.iastate.edu/scholarships/freshman/younkersfarmaid>.

<sup>270</sup> "Nelson Optimistic About Farm Aid II," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1986, accessed July 14, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1986-04-30/entertainment/ca-2916\\_1\\_willie-nelson](http://articles.latimes.com/1986-04-30/entertainment/ca-2916_1_willie-nelson).

<sup>271</sup> "Socially Responsible Causes Ben & Jerry's Has Advocated For," Ben & Jerry's, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/corporate-social-responsibility-history>.

Willie Nelson's Country Peach Cobbler. Part of the proceeds of that flavor went to Farm Aid.<sup>272</sup> Ben & Jerry's relationship with Farm Aid continued through 2015.

Farm Aid's long-term sponsorships didn't begin and end with Ben & Jerry's. Since 1990, Farm Aid has worked with a significant number of corporate sponsors to not only help underwrite its costs, but to also drum up the funds that were necessary to continue holding and broadcasting the annual concert as well as to cover other expenses. The corporations that have sponsored Farm Aid vary greatly. From Best Buy to Silk Soymilk, Farm Aid has obtained sponsorships from large companies.

Farm Aid now holds strict sponsorship guidelines.<sup>273</sup> But even those guidelines have bent slightly. Some critics have argued that not all the sponsors of Farm Aid operate in the best interest of the family farmer.<sup>274</sup> Sponsors such as Silk Soymilk and Horizon Organic (both owned by agribusiness giant Dean Foods), have come under scrutiny for their farming and pricing practices as being unethical and inhumane to animals.<sup>275</sup> Silk Soymilk remained a sponsor through 2009, while Horizon Organic has maintained its sponsorship through 2015. Notwithstanding some earlier "ethical" challenges, Farm Aid has relied on sponsors to underwrite the cost of the annual concert every year in its existence.

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<sup>272</sup> Stephanie Sharp, "15 Pop Culture-Inspired Ben and Jerry's Flavors," *Paste Magazine*, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.pastemagazine.com/blogs/lists/2013/04/14-pop-culture-inspired-names-for-ben-and-jerrys-ice-cream.html>.

<sup>273</sup> From 2009: "Because sponsorship is a mutually beneficial relationship in which Farm Aid lends its valuable brand name to a company's promotions and marketing, in exchange for a sponsorship fee, Farm Aid seeks association with companies which make a demonstrable concession to family farm values. Consumers are helped in their food choices by labels, brands, and marketing campaigns that help them know who grew their food, where, and how it was grown. Farm Aid urges companies to be transparent, accountable, and actively increasing opportunities for US family farmers. While no business or organization (or even farm!) is perfect, we seek partners who are moving in a positive direction for a future of good food from family farms." Jennifer Lance, "Horizon Organic and Silk Soymilk: Integrity of Farm Aid Sponsors Questionable," *greenlivingideas*, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://greenlivingideas.com/2009/07/22/horizon-organic-silk-soymilk-integrity-farm-aid-sponsors-questionable/>. "Farm Aid's Sponsorship Philosophy," Farm Aid, accessed July 27, 2015, <https://www.farmaid.org/concert/sponsors/farm-aids-sponsorship-philosophy/>.

<sup>274</sup> Lance, "Horizon Organic and Silk Soymilk," *greenlivingideas*, accessed July 27, 2015.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

#### D. The Downsizing

Farm Aid organizers began with the intention that one concert would raise enough awareness, donations and policymaker support that there would be no need for another one. However, as donations began to pile in, by the end of the night of the first concert, organizers began to realize that their goal of \$50 million would be unachievable. Despite an outpouring of support by the farming community, policymakers, musicians, actors, and the local community, and media coverage advertising its cause, Farm Aid failed to reach its \$50 million goal.

Momentum slowed after the third Farm Aid concert. Organizers were faced with an annual concert that failed to solicit viewers and attendees from donating as much as originally hoped. Even after the third Farm Aid concert, the original goal of the first concert still hadn't been met. In fact, the original goal of \$50 million still had not been met by 2015.<sup>276</sup> After the third Farm Aid concert in 1987, Nelson decided to take a break from organizing the concert. In 1989, Nelson dubbed his small tour "Farm Aid On The Road." At each stop Nelson encouraged local media to meet with him and family farmers to convey the message that the farm crisis was not over and, more important, was not just a national problem, but a local one; a problem that affected the food on the tables of families.

Three years after Farm Aid III in 1987, the concert returned in full force. The fourth Farm Aid concert sold out in 90 minutes and boasted a lineup that crossed musical genres from hard rock to country. However, as the years followed, less money was being raised to help the family farmer (each annual show grossed roughly \$1 million before expenses are taken out).<sup>277</sup> By the

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<sup>276</sup> "About Us," Farm Aid, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.farmaid.org/about-us/>.

<sup>277</sup> Farm Aid I: \$10 million; Farm Aid II: \$1.5 million; Farm III: \$1.6 million; Farm Aid IV: \$1.2 million; Farm Aid V: \$1 million; Farm Aid '95: \$1.2 million; Farm Aid '01: \$1.3 million; Farm Aid '03: \$1 million; Farm Aid '06: \$1.5 million; Schoemer, "Farm Aid: Music Omits Message," *New York Times*, March 16, 1992, C11. "People in the News," Associated Press, November 7, 1992. "Our Annual Concert: Past Concerts," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, [http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past\\_Concerts.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qII5IhNVJsE/b.2723673/k.8C39/Past_Concerts.htm). Iacobelli, "After 11 Years of Farm Aid," Associated Press, October 10, 1996. Gustafson, "Farm Scene," Associated Press, September 9,

time of Farm Aid's tenth anniversary in 1995, the number of acts performing at Farm Aid declined significantly (1985: 53, 1995: 9). This was due to two reasons: (1) many of the popular acts at the time had already played Farm Aid and some felt they had done their duty and (2) the acts were not paid for their performances therefore, all costs were incurred by the artist – eventually the cost may have become too great to bear. In addition, the concerts were still well attended, but failed to garner the significant media coverage as in years past.

At the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert in Milwaukee, the concert lineup boasted just thirteen acts for the all-day concert – a small number compared to the fifty-four that played the first Farm Aid. It should be noted that the 2010 concert was the first time that Farm Aid had been held in a stadium since 1996. Between 1996 and 2010, Farm Aid concerts were held in amphitheaters and music centers – both holding roughly 25,000-30,000 people. The overall decline in venue booking in terms of capacity can be seen as Farm Aid becoming aware of the shrinking attendance at their concerts. Furthermore, the shrinking attendance could be in direct relation to the downsizing of the overall lineup at Farm Aid concerts. Artists were not flocking to play Farm Aid as they did in the concert's infancy. Farm Aid stated the reduction in artists taking part was their decision because they wanted acts to perform more than 20 minutes. Unfortunately, that contradicts the lineup of the 2005 Farm Aid concert and for the following three years. The 2005-2008 lineup boasted upwards of 24 acts.

Despite the lineup and venue downsizing, Farm Aid continues to attract policymakers to its events. This can be attributed to the lasting message about the Good Food Movement, its

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2003. "Report: Farm Aid Donates Small Percentage of Funds," Associated Press, September 17, 2005. "A Bit About Us: News," Farm Aid, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://www.farmaid.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=qlI5IhNVJsE&b=2792875&ct=3852013>. Hegeman, "Unrelenting Drought Taking Toll," Associated Press, October 3, 2006.



place in culture and the attention the overall messaging of good food receives from policymakers and the media.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

Farm Aid's devotion to its cause has certainly played a role in the organization's longevity. Farm Aid has championed and advocated for the family farmer for over 25 years. The annual concert continues to draw an audience each year – even though attendance has generally declined through the years. What started in stadiums has now been relegated to smaller amphitheaters – still an admirable feat. However, the amount of attention Farm Aid attracts from the media (including national news outlets) has dwindled considerably. Farm Aid's overall reach has declined, but it's not necessarily the organization's fault. Farm Aid's longevity can be attributed to consistent communication and evolution.

The farming crisis of the mid-80s was no longer in the public eye and, in some regards, resolved by the end of the decade. However, farmers were still not out of the water. The number of family farmers was still shrinking. Many farmers were forced to close due to the increase of the corporate farming industry boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The farmer was no longer the focus of the media or the public. There were new philanthropic charities popping up by the droves all over the country. The choice was simple: Farm Aid needed to evolve to have any hope for longevity.

To do so, Farm Aid changed its mission and messaging. From what once was “save the family farmer” went to “save the family farmer and protect our land” to “help the family farmer thrive, eat good food, and change the system.” Farm Aid communicated that message every chance it had. All of its celebrity board members pushed their new messages and renewed focus. But in the onset, it seemed to fall on deaf ears. In some cases, Farm Aid failed to even mention

its goals at the annual concert. The message change came at a time when attendance at the concerts was falling, fewer acts were signing on to perform at the event, and Farm Aid was struggling to stay afloat. Farm Aid did have one other ace up its sleeve: every year Farm Aid visited a new city. A new city that had a whole new audience to educate, a new set of farmers to advocate for, new local media attention, and a new group of policymakers to appeal to attend.

Coincidentally, in the 1990's a shift happened in the food culture – and Farm Aid capitalized. The introduction of organic foods grown from sustainable land began to take hold in the marketplace. Specialized grocery stores began selling only food grown from organic sources. Farm Aid took note of the importance of the organic farming industry and how it related to the shifting culture in the marketplace. In 1990, Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act and Farm Aid began to advocate for the organic farmer.<sup>278</sup> Suddenly, Whole Foods and Silk Soymilk were sponsoring the Farm Aid concerts.

Ironically, the market and culture shift to organic farming and foods may have saved Farm Aid. There was a notable change in Farm Aid's focus; it went from focusing on legislative politics to consumer activism. Farm Aid was now focusing on the consumer with an underlying goal that helps the family farmer. Educating consumers on the effects of buying food grown from a family farm had more potential to impact farmers than trying to convince policymakers to take legislative action. If not for the new focus on what Farm Aid called the Good Food Movement, the threat of closure may have loomed. People were still showing up at the annual concert and Farm Aid took advantage by unveiling the HomeGrown Village. Despite Farm

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<sup>278</sup> “After years of Farm Aid advocating for organic farmers, Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act, establishing a certification program for organic farms that commit to environmental stewardship, animal welfare, and food grown without the use of synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, or genetic engineering. In 2002, the final USDA regulations were issued, after Farm Aid and many thousands of organic advocates weighed in for rules with integrity.” “Thirty Years of Action,” Farm Aid, accessed October 27, 2016, <https://www.farmaid.org/issues/industrial-agriculture/farm-aid-thirty-years-of-action-for-family-farmers/>.

Aid's new focus, and the celebrity-board's consistent message reinforcement, Farm Aid's message was falling on deaf ears; each annual concert was still grossing roughly only \$1 million and it has taken almost thirty years for Farm Aid to reach its original goal from the first concert.

Farm Aid also failed to capitalize on raising additional funds beyond its annual concert. Media coverage indicated a CD and video release from the first Farm Aid concert were imminent. Neither occurred. Neither did any follow-up audio release except for one double-disc set that featured a compilation of songs in 2000. Video releases were also rare (2001 and 2003). With dying music revenues because of streaming and the concert video business in a sharp decline, Farm Aid has lost most avenues for potential revenue with physical releases. Now Farm Aid posts previous concerts for free on its YouTube channel.

Farm Aid initially received significant media coverage from major newspaper outlets. The first Farm Aid occurred during a time when music philanthropy was at an all-time high. Live Aid occurred in the same year. Mega-concerts were the new norm in 1985. Coverage eventually waned. Most was dedicated to specific concert announcements with few exceptions. Media coverage on the first event was significant. It was the first time a mega-concert of that nature was planned around assisting an occupation. The coverage helped educate the public on not only the concert, but also the inherent problem of the farming industry at the time. As Farm Aid changed their message and format, media coverage failed to contribute to any success that the organization would achieve.

By the mid-2000s Farm Aid was facing negative press coverage revolving around the organization's use of funds. Despite several negative articles in the press, Farm Aid had a black mark on its record. Attendance at the annual concerts had dwindled. There was negative press attention. Policymakers were nowhere to be found. Farm Aid needed a way to communicate its

message and reach the masses. Farm Aid again evolved and became engaged with social media. Finally, there was a media outlet that Farm Aid could control and not only reach its intended audience, but also present opportunities for the messaging to reach those outside of its normal followers. The Farm Aid Facebook page consistently receives member interaction and significant portions of their shared articles are on organic farming and challenging the system in which food regulations are established.

But much of the coverage after the initial two Farm Aid concerts featured figurehead Willie Nelson. Nelson became the de-facto spokesperson for Farm Aid – and rightfully so, it was his idea to do it. Nelson continues to reap the benefits of being Farm Aid’s go-to guy. He’s befriended policymakers, farmers, and other musicians – all of whom Nelson has gotten to take part in Farm Aid. He’s also gotten press mentions because of it – helping him to cement his status as one of the last country musicians from the 1960s. He may have even sold more tickets to his own concerts because of Farm Aid. But the question remains as to what happens when Willie can no longer do represent Farm Aid? Or he passes away? Will Farm Aid still remain as relevant without Willie driving the bus? Carolyn Mugar places much of Farm Aid’s success on Willie Nelson. It’s hard to envision Farm Aid carrying on Willie’s torch after he is gone, at least to the degree of its current operation (2016). Perhaps once the “old-guard” has moved on to other pastures, a new slew of musician representatives will stand-up for the family farmer.

Media coverage, policy advocacy, and communication have all played an equal role in Farm Aid’s longevity. In the onset, without media coverage, Farm Aid would not have stood a chance in raising money or awareness about the family farmer and the farming crisis of the 1980s. But by the mid-2000s, Farm Aid received negative attention in the press and hasn’t been able to attract much national coverage since then. That has been one of Farm Aid’s biggest

challenges. Without national media coverage, Farm Aid's message hasn't been communicated to a wider audience. Yes, social media is important and plays a role, but only if people seek out Farm Aid on those channels. Perhaps Farm Aid's evolution in messaging was also to attract more media coverage, if so, it doesn't seem that worked either. Regardless, Farm Aid has soldiered on.

The question remains whether Farm Aid has made a significant impact beyond raising awareness and money. The answer is murky at best. Carolyn Mugar seems to think so, as does the rest of Farm Aid's board. In particular, Nelson has consistently championed the cause – long after those policymakers who had lent their support left Washington and all but disappeared from the public eye. Despite various political activities, and advocating for legislation, I have not found any evidence or indication that Farm Aid has actually had an impact on policy, at least not by itself. Farm Aid is part of a larger conversation about farming policy. Farm Aid educates. Farm Aid informs. Farm Aid advocates. But Farm Aid, and charity rock in general, has not changed public policy – however it may have played a role.

This research is not exhaustive; it has barely scratched the surface. There are also many variables and gaps in this research. A more exhaustive analysis of media coverage at the national and local levels could be examined to obtain a more thorough understanding of both the reach and impact Farm Aid has. Furthermore, this analysis is from 1985-2010. Since then, Farm Aid has continued to advocate for farmers and attempt to alter public policy. An examination of years 2010-2016 could provide a deeper understanding of what Farm Aid has achieved. Further research could also include exhaustive interviews with former policymakers who took part in Farm Aid, musicians who are no longer appearing at Farm Aid concerts, and former members of the Farm Aid board to determine the organization's impact, success, and challenges. It is also

worth noting that conducting an ethnographic experiment on Farm Aid in one city would yield results in producing the planning and goals that are dedicated towards to holding this event. Surveying concertgoers as they enter the concert about how they feel about family farming and then following up with them three, six, and twelve months later could also be beneficial in determining whether the concert and messaging had a lasting impact.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

Farm Aid has been, and remains, a steadfast supporter of the family farmer. The organization has helped raise awareness and educate consumers. However, support is hard to measure, it has ebbed and flowed as cultural shifts occurred, and audiences have dwindled since 1985. Farm Aid has also attempted to alter public policy, but the vision for the perfect policy has never materialized with policymakers and there is not any concrete evidence that Farm Aid has successfully done so on its own. Farm Aid has raised a lot of money, but nowhere near its intended goals and has failed to capitalize on other streams of revenue. Farm Aid has received mostly positive praise in the press, but not without some controversy. Farm Aid may be one of the longest running annual charity concerts, but the farming industry is no longer the hotbed for charity it once was. Healthy and locally sourced food is.

There is no question that Farm Aid has made an impact and is doing *some* good. What is difficult to define, though, is how much good. Furthermore, in 25 years Farm Aid has altered its messaging several times to maintain relevance and prominence as *the* champion for the family farmer and the Good Food Movement. Farm Aid has changed its messaging so many times that even some farmers had questioned the organization's purpose and existence. But perhaps Farm Aid is so deeply involved advocating for the family farmer and organic farming industry that there really is no way out. Farm Aid has no choice to continue pushing forward. Willie Nelson

stated that he didn't realize he'd become the champion for the family farmer. Now that he is known for his tireless advocacy for the family farmer, he can't get out. And if he did, Farm Aid would lose its biggest figurehead, advocate, and glad-hander.

Farm Aid has no choice but to continue moving forward. In doing so, its brand and messaging will evolve, the board of directors will eventually move on, but the family farmer will still be needed. The market demands it, for now. Factory farms are scrambling to alter the food manufacturing process to include ingredients that are not chemically engineered. Yet family farmers will argue that food is still manufactured and not healthy. As long as factory farms continue to manufacture and sell food sourced from anywhere else but a real farm, the family farmer will be needed and Farm Aid will be there to support them. But at the end of the day, it may just be about the music after all.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Interview with Carolyn Mugar, Executive Director of Farm Aid**

**April 12, 2012, 1:00 ET**

AP: Thanks for calling me back.

CM: You're so welcome. Thanks for the work you're doing. It sounds fascinating.

AP: I appreciate that. You know, it's been a work in progress that's for certain. I've been working on it for probably about seven months now already so.

CM: Tell me quickly, I know Jen has told me some, but, tell me, this is for your doctoral thesis, right?

AP: That's correct.

CM: And what is the...do doctoral thesis' have titles? Having never written one, I don't know.

AP: Oh yeah, actually, it's for my master's thesis, excuse me, not my PhD. Hope to get there soon. (laughs)

CM: I don't have a masters either so. (laughs) What's the title of it?

AP: Still working on it right now, the actual title. But it will be discussing Farm Aid in particular. It's basically a case study on Farm Aid. My department is in the Journalism/Media Studies area. What I'm really focusing on is kind of the power that the media has when it comes to non-profit organizations. And Farm Aid in itself is my focus on it because I'm very passionate about Farm Aid. I love music. Andy York is a good friend of mine.

CM: Yeah, that's what Jen just told me. Great guy.

AP: Oh isn't he wonderful? He's just been..

CM: Now, isn't he married to our good buddy?

AP: I'm sorry?

CM: He's married to a really good friend of ours. What's his wife's name? I know her.

AP: Liz.

CM: Liz. See and we knew Liz awhile ago because she used to work for Mellencamp.

AP: That's right. That's right.

CM: And we just saw them actually in...um...we just saw both of them...in fact I have two pictures I've gotta send to them...We saw them in Nash...no...what was it. Atlanta. 'Cause John's play opened.

AP: Oh. Did you go down and see it?

CM: Yeah we did. The opening. Jen, myself, and Glenda.

AP: Did you like it?

CM: Actually I did. It was very...You know...It's very all encompassing. Or how do you put it. It's very mood-creating. It's quite cool. No he's a great guy. So did you grow up in Indiana or did he grow up in Wisconsin?

AP: Neither or actually. It's really fascinating. I had come close to Mellencamp's group through Tony Buelcher who runs...

CM: What is his name?

AP: Tony Buelcher? Is his last name. He runs John's website and stuff.

CM: Oh ok.

AP: And then through him I actually won, when I was really young, I won a meet and greet thing with Mellencamp's band at a concert here in Milwaukee. And, um, and then Andy and I met and we just kind of hit it off. I'm a musician as well and come to find out that Andy and I had tons of mutual friends and we actually played for the same guy at one particular point throughout our career. So we this really instant connection and bond. So Andy and I just became really good friends and anytime he comes close with John, to the Milwaukee area, we always spend time together and hang out. It's just great.

CM: What do you play? What's your instrument?

AP: I'm guitar as well.

CM: Your guitar. How interesting. This is a great story. So you're at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

AP: Yup, I am.

CM: Well we had a great show there. I loved, loved, loved when we were out there. I loved the people and everything.

AP: Yeah it's a great area. And to be honest with you, I covered the press event for John's website for Tony.

CM: Oh cool.

AP: And so I was at the press event at Helfaer field and I was there the whole day. And I actually met up with them at the hotel later that night hanging out with Andy, which is just really funny. It was just a great day. I remember sitting out there in the bleachers just listening to all you guys talk. And I remember the mayor of Milwaukee at the time handed over, proclaiming Farm Aid day on October 2, 2010 and everything and I remember thinking...gosh this is so cool. So many media organizations are here, all these farmers, and these musicians, and it was just a great coming together; of this event and all of this coverage that you guys were getting. And I began thinking to myself, boy, it's crazy that this still has to happen.

CM: Well you're right...You and Willie. That's exactly what Willie would say. Cause he always says we don't want to have to have Farm Aid. That's exactly right. Because we wish that we didn't, that government, that, you know, there was a vision for agriculture and programs for farmers, that, provided all the things that people unfortunately have to pick up the pieces and do.

AP: Yeah. So Carolyn you've been involved with Farm Aid since 198...since the beginning, correct?

CM: Yeah since about a few weeks before the first concert. I can't remember. Yes, it was a few weeks maybe three weeks or something.

AP: Ok and did Willie kind of enlist you to be a part of it? Is that how it happened?

CM: Well it happened through a mutual friend of his and mine who is a guy named Bill Whitliff who is a guy who wrote the movie Country and he had done a lot of research on rural America and on farm crisis because...Did you ever see that film with Jessica Lange and...

AP: No.

CM: Oh you must. You must rent the movie Country. Jessica Lange and, what's his name, the guy she married. I can't remember his name. He's a famous actor. But I think Sissy Spacek was in it. Maybe I'm wrong about that. But Jessica Lange was definitely in it. Sam Shepherd. It's a very poignant movie. I'm just googling it right this second to make sure...But...Bill Whitliff wrote it and he did a lot of research and he was a friend of Willie's and he said to Willie maybe I get involved with Farm Aid. That's kind of how it happened. I was doing something else entirely at the time. Anyway.

AP: So you've run the whole gamut of Farm Aid. Almost thirty years, coming up on thirty years here. And if you could look back, retrospectively, what do you think are Farm Aid's greatest achievement?

CM: Well it's a very good question. It's probably not one thing but, rather, as Willie said when we started out, it's to raise money and awareness. And if we look back and see what was and wasn't happening when Farm Aid started and what is happening now...there's been a huge, huge difference. I have to say Farm Aid has a fair amount to do with it. At the time people knew there was something wrong in the country when family farmers were being forced off their land. They just felt it was, at a gut level, that it was wrong and they knew farmers. A lot of people still have a relative that farms or farmed. And people just felt there was something wrong with this country and we should do something to help family farmers. I think that, when it started, that was what the response was and it was a very positive response to a problem that people didn't think was right. So, I think that, it quickly moved into an understanding by the Farm Aid board and our artists that there was a lot more wrong with our system of agriculture that needed to be dealt with. As soon as we came on the scene, people knew that factory farms were coming and they were very aware of the control of corporate agriculture. Farmers have long been the victims of the control of corporations over their lives. I always say to people, in terms of the occupy movement, I think farmers were the canary in the mine. Really in terms of the first people to experience it so deeply and widely and they knew as well as anybody what the problems are when you don't have control over the price you get for what you grow and how you farm. That was I think maybe one of our biggest accomplishments is one of these huge shifts that has taken place. That the country has really turned and has become really conscious of the problem of processed food and food that is controlled by someone that's way far from the farm. That's a hard thing to measure. And it's a real hard thing to say what did we do versus what everyone else did. But I feel certain that Willie and all the communication that went on around Farm Aid had something to do with it. I think we really had a lot to do, at that time especially; it gave farmers hope to keep farming. We got so many responses from people at the time saying that Willie really gave farmers the hope to hang on. And then we really found ways to support, in the countryside, the various groups that we're working to keep farming the land. The various hotlines and people that became what we call farm advocates – which we still do everyday. That's one of the big parts of what we do is, we're just coming out with it, a whole new farmer resource network we will be launching it. It's now online. It's about 500, at least, references for people to follow. All different things that they might need. Maybe emergency. Debt restructuring. All of the things that are marketing opportunities for farmers, chemically intensive in their farming, organic, bla bla bla. There's a huge array of networks and resources that farmers can go to in the new farm resource network. So and that's something we've kept that religiously. On top of that is the whole communication thing. As Willie said it's to raise awareness. And that is one of the things that is perhaps our unique opportunity because we work with, I often say, four of the best communicators in the country: Willie, John, Neil, and Dave are really communicators. So they're able to put things in a nutshell at times and really hit it home for people. So I don't what the one big thing is but it's somewhere in there.



- AP: To be truthful, you guys have a lot to be proud of. I remember walking away from the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Farm Aid with a renewed sense of what I was putting in my body; food-wise and it's amazing because sometimes you can forget how that impacts one person and how they go home and tell so many other people about it.
- CM: Well you know that is true too. And that's one of the things you can't measure. But I've heard from so many people after concerts. They say just that. I've really changed how I ate after I went to the concert.
- AP: Absolutely. I want to jump back for a second, Carolyn. You were talking about the various shifts in agricultural policy and that was one of the reasons why you guys, why Farm Aid in of itself found the need to exist in the first place. You've certainly gotten a lot of political support over the years, political appearances. I think back to the Milwaukee show and the mayor being here and Senator Russ Feingold was there. Do you find that support helps quite a bit when they show up?
- CM: Well, again, that's a hard thing to measure. I can't help but think that it does help people in terms of thinking that this is an important issue. You know, if they have any respect for these people, which I presume they do if they elect them into office. Then they say this person is there and saying this is important. I think that does have an effect on people. One of the problems is that there are such strong lobbyists in Washington. Lobbying for the huge corporations that control so much of our agriculture that it's really hard to get...so many of the new good things that are happening, are happening on the local level. Of course some good things happen in the farm bill, but I really have to credit people in so many ways in terms of how people have gone about creating new food systems which, not only includes growing and farmers, but transportation and distribution. Helping people get better access to food in schools in poor areas and the food desert question. I'm sure you know all about this. I think that is very urgent. And it so often happens on a very local level. Yet so much control is held on a federal level too. Farm policy. It's a real balance. You have to do both at once. You have to sort of try and change the bad policy at the same time you have to create a new system. That's how I see it.
- AP: What are some of the ways you guys look at policy and try and think about how can we impact better policy for our farmers? Because that's really sort of the argument that's going on; the big thing you're trying to influence, right?
- CM: Well it is and it isn't. I would say that in many ways we work with a lot of groups that work on the policy level. We are not a policy organization per se. We have two people that graduated from the Freidman School of Nutrition and food stuff and agriculture. So they know policy well. But we certainly are not policy analysts per se, nor are we; we work with a lot of groups in Washington that are very, very good. They go far as far as they can go. We do a lot of work on our website; letting people know what the issues are. So yes, I do think it's an important part of it, but I think what's really important is informing people about what's in their food, how they can support family farmers, what

they should be demanding both at the marketplace and with their Congress-people, how they can bring about changes in this food system. And I think we would see our role as communicators even more importantly than as policy changers per se. Or rather I should say that's how we think we can effect policy is by in the public realm. Farm Aid has a reach that perhaps a lot of the others don't just because it's a cultural organization really. It really is talking about relating to people in ways...you know the wonderful policy people that we work with are great. We work with farm organizations all over the country and they do so much work on a local level, a lot of times with their state legislatures, which is very important stuff. There's the National Family Farm Coalition in Washington that kind of gathers a lot of different groups together. There's quite a few different organizations that are in it and they represent people on the issues within Washington and they're very effective. I can't remember your question, but it was how...

AP: That's ok. This isn't anything formal. Informalities are absolutely fine. This isn't anything that's professional. It's just really good stuff. I think one of the things that I took away from Farm Aid is you guys really formed this sense of community among the concertgoers, the farmers, and among the musicians and events that are taking place. I think that...that sense of community is what really just categorizes Farm Aid as such an awesome organization and what you do. I mean the education levels are just outstanding. They really are.

CM: Thank you Andrew. You're kind. Willie's whole way of operating. This very much a Willie led in terms of his behavior and Willie's belief on how Willie lives and works and he's an incredibly inclusive person and very it's a very big tent that we work in. We work with organic, but we are by no means an organic only organization. We work with wonderful groups around the country that are groups of organic farmers that do organic policy work. We work with organic companies, but we are the big tent. Because we firmly believe that every family farmer that's on the land is important. And if a family farmer gets forced off their land, that is an important person, an important contributor to society and to the fabric of society. If you want to change to organic then the basis of that is farmers that are already farming and perhaps doing transition. Willie is a very inclusive person. If you've never been to a Willie concert, I'm sure you have, every kind of person is there. Willie brought people together. He gets very upset when people close the door. He never does. It's a real open door here. So I think that's really how we've operated. We love the concert for that reason; that it brings people together and that's why we travel around. It's hard traveling around from place to place because you don't build one fan base that comes back every year. You have to create a new surrounding every time and yet we learn so much because although we've worked with farmers in Wisconsin for years, going to Wisconsin gave us the chance to dig in a lot deeper. So we love going around. It's hard, but it works. And as you say, you can gather people there and hope we leave something behind that's positive for people. We've often brought people together that actually weren't in contact with each other and it kind of helps when you get them all together and you realize "gee I could be working with this person, etc. etc."

- AP: Yeah it's really, just, Farm Aid really seems to serve as a catalyst for so many things.
- CM: Yeah I hope so. Now tell me what you think. I've got to learn from you. I think it does too. Sometimes it's hard to tell from the inside out.
- AP: Again, just from my personal experience and the people I was with at the 25<sup>th</sup> concert, it changed my mindset on quite a few things. I think the thing that really inspired me, being a musician; I go to these festivals all the time, and every one there was so polite and so concerned about the particular issues that it really felt like this giant community. People coming together to support this cause that is just tied so deeply to American history and symbolism that it took on this life of its own. I remember having lengthy conversations with the people that I was that day, and I was with quite a few. And everyone just walked away with a renewed sense of what it takes to be a farmer, what it takes to support a farmer and how that, in turn, really affects every day families all over this country. By the food that we eat. It's really something. I come from a farming family. My family for many years were farmers until the late 60s. So it has a personal connection to me too.
- CM: Sure. It's very interesting to hear you say this because we...it's very rewarding. That's exactly what our intention is that some people should get a renewed sense or a new sense. Which ever it is. Of what it takes and what their role can be in in. There's a place for everybody in this. There really is. I always tell people; when I go grocery shopping to the supermarket, I mostly each time ask one of the buyers, meat buyer, vegetable buyer, I ask them a question about one of the items – where does it come from, what's their content, bla bla bla. It keeps people on their toes. I actually go back to people for the answers sometimes. Even simple things like that, there's of course farmer's markets and CSA's and things that are obvious, and getting to know a farmer yourself. I'm glad to know it had that effect, Andy. I'm very glad. Now you're giving me a lot of hope. Thank you.
- AP: That's good. You guys should have a lot of hope. I think what you guys are doing is very good.
- CM: We do. But we just want to do more. We're greedy. We want to do a lot. We try to do too much. That's the way we all are here.
- AP: That's a good thing. You guys have a great staff. Everything that I've pulled up and researched and read and the involvement of the musicians into the politics and the things that you're doing community-wise, your social media initiatives all those things are serving the right purpose.
- CM: Great.
- AP: I share your Farm Aid posts quite a bit on Facebook. I think that you guys have a lot of things to be very proud of.

CM: Listen, do you want to work for us?

AP: I'd love to.

CM: I think you should be one of those people that stands up in the audience and says all these good things when asked.

AP: I appreciate that. I had talked with Jen and I hope to come to you guys when you have it this year. From what I gathered it sounds like it will be in September.

CM: Yeah September, we haven't announced it yet, it's September 22, in Pennsylvania, Hershey. As I say, we haven't announced it.

AP: Don't worry about it; it's confidential.

CM: It would be great. Also, Andy, she said you might have questions to ask us as we go along. Please don't hesitate to send us questions as you go along.

AP: Thank you very much Carolyn. Honestly, I can't thank you enough for taking the time out. I know you're an extremely busy person.

CM: It was my pleasure. I tell you, it's really a pleasure to hear your feedback. But if you have more stuff now? I'm happy to do it.

AP: I don't have anything further now. But as I go along I'm sure I'll have quite a bit.

CM: And please email me. It's carolyn@farmaid.org. And you know Jen. Please stay in touch with us.

AP: Absolutely. And please don't be afraid to ask for anything you may need on my end as well. I'd be glad to help you guys out with anything.

CM: Well I want to come back to Milwaukee. I really loved Milwaukee. Since I was there, everytime I read about something, I think "Oh My God, I didn't even know that." I keep thinking I wish I had known that while I was there. A friend of mine is getting her doctorate from University of Wisconsin – Madison. Food and farming stuff too. But she's doing it out of land control. It's pretty interesting. Now will you stay in touch? Will you promise to stay in touch?

AP: Absolutely. I hope to see you guys in Hershey.

CM: Me too. And just let us know whatever you might want to know. Seriously. We're happy to chat. It's a pleasure.

AP: Awe thanks Carolyn. And please send my regards to Jen for getting this coordinated as well, I truly appreciate it.

CM: I will do that for sure. For sure. Take care.

AP: You too. Thanks again.

CM: Ok. Sure. You're Welcome.

CM: Bye.

## APPENDIX B:

### Table of Previous Farm Aid Concerts

<b>Farm Aid</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Attendance*</b>	<b>Money*</b>
Farm Aid I	September 22, 1985	Champaign, Illinois	Memorial Stadium	78,000	\$10m
Farm Aid II	July 4, 1986	Manor, Texas	Manor Downs Racetrack	40,000	\$1.3m
Farm Aid III	September 19, 1987	Lincoln, Nebraska	Memorial Stadium	70,000	\$3.3m
Farm Aid IV	April 7, 1990	Indianapolis, Indiana	Hoosier Dome	45,000	\$1.3m
Farm Aid V	March 14, 1992	Irving, Texas	Texas Stadium	50,000	\$1m
Farm Aid VI	April 24, 1993	Ames, Iowa	Cyclone Stadium	40,000	
Farm Aid VII	September 18, 1994	New Orleans, Louisiana	Louisiana Superdome		\$750,000
Farm Aid '95	October 1, 1995	Louisville, Kentucky	Cardinal Stadium	47,000	\$1.2m
Farm Aid '96	October 12, 1996	Columbia, South Carolina	Williams-Brice Stadium	45,000	\$1.4m
Farm Aid '97	October 4, 1997	Tinley Park, Illinois	New World Music Theater	30,000	\$1.6m
Farm Aid '98	October 3, 1998	Tinley Park, Illinois	New World Music Theater	30,000	\$1.2m
Farm Aid '99	September 12, 1999	Bristow, Virginia	Nissan Pavilion	23,000	\$1.7m
Farm Aid '00	September 17, 2000	Bristow, Virginia	Nissan Pavilion		\$1.3m
Farm Aid '01	September 29, 2001	Noblesville, Indiana	Verizon Wireless Music Center	24,000	\$1.3m
Farm Aid '02	September 21, 2002	Burgettstown, Pennsylvania	Post-Gazette Pavilion	23,000	\$1.6m
Farm Aid '03	September 7, 2003	Columbus, Ohio	Germain, Amphitheater	20,000	\$1m

Farm Aid '04	September 18, 2004	Seattle, Washington	White River Amphitheater	20,000	\$1m
Farm Aid '05	September 18, 2005	Tinley Park, Illinois	First Midwest Bank Amphitheater	28,000	\$1.6m
Farm Aid '06	September 30, 2006	Camden, New Jersey	Tweeter Center	25,000	\$1.5m
Farm Aid '07	September 9, 2007	New York City, New York	Randall's Island	26,000	\$2.5m
Farm Aid '08	September 20, 2008	Mansfield, Massachusetts	Comcast Center	20,000	\$2m
Farm Aid '09	October 4, 2009	St. Louis, Missouri	Verizon Wireless Amphitheater	20,000	\$1.7m
Farm Aid 2010	October 10, 2010	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Miller Park	35,000	\$3.2m

\* Estimates; numbers are from Farm Aid and news coverage included in this study