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**Review of *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby,  
1919-1981* by John Mark Hansen**

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**Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919-1981.** John Mark Hansen. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984. 265 pp. Bibliography. \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0-226-31554-1).

This work explores the impact that interest groups have on influencing national agricultural legislation, and thus, U.S. agricultural policy. The term "interest groups" implies the entire gambit of those who desire to, or actually do, have notable impact on the formulation of U.S. agricultural policy. Actually, Hansen confines his analysis (except for the National Milk Producers Federation) to those general farm organizations that were active during the period 1919-1981.

By confining his main analysis to general farm organizations (American Farm Bureau Federation, National Farmers Union, National Farmers Organization, etc.), Hansen misses other major players who also have access to Congress. In recent times, it might be argued that commodity groups representing producers of corn, wheat, cattle, hogs, cotton, sugar, peanuts, etc., often have better access to Congress than the general farm organizations. Further, the omission of the influence of the multinational agribusinesses headquartered in the United States, combined with the transportation and agricultural chemical industry, ignores an impact on agricultural policy that may exceed that of the producer organizations.

Despite these shortcomings, this work provides a six-decade look at the changing fortunes of selected farm producer organizations in their quest to shape agricultural policy. Hansen divides his analysis of general farm organizations into two-parts the origin of their access to congress and the rising or falling impact these organizations have had on the formulation of agricultural legislation over the study period.

To some, the analytical theme may be demeaning to members of Congress. Hansen argues that congressional representatives are driven primarily to do what is necessary to remain in Washington, DC. "They have an idea of the positions they need to take to gain reelection, but they do not know for sure." Agricultural lobbying groups, Hansen argues, can influence the votes of congressional members if two conditions are met: "(1) when interest groups enjoy competitive advantage over their rivals in meeting congressional reelection needs; and (2) when legislators expect the issues and circumstances that established the competitive advantage to recur."

Thus, if the voters demand, or are ambivalent to, high price supports of agricultural products, those farm organizations who espouse this philosophy will be granted "access" to congressional members and those who oppose are

ignored, according to Hansen. If reelection is secured, the influence of the "high price support" farm organization is made more secure.

For those who grant some independent thought to members of congress, Hansen's book might still be useful in reviewing the agricultural policy positions taken by selected major farm organizations over time. **Jim Kendrick**, *Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.