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Don Paarlberg, 94, Agricultural Economics Adviser to 3 Presidents, Is Dead

By WOLFGANG SAXON FEB. 20, 2006

Don Paarlberg, a farmer, writer and professor of agricultural economics who, as a White House assistant, helped President Dwight D. Eisenhower prepare and run his Food for Peace initiative, died Tuesday in West Lafayette, Ind. He was 94.

His death was announced by Soller-Baker Funeral Homes in Lafayette.

Dr. Paarlberg, an academic with hands-on farming experience, was an assistant secretary of agriculture when Eisenhower chose him as a special assistant to the president in the late 1950's. He was entrusted with shepherding what became Food for Peace, formally known as Public Law 480, Title II, into existence and serving as its coordinator in its fledgling years, from 1958 to 1961.

Food for Peace evolved from earlier famine relief efforts, particularly the part of the Marshall Plan that helped keep millions from starving in Europe after World War II. By the early 1950's, American grain surpluses had grown to mountains, and Eisenhower sold the program to Congress as "the basis for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products with lasting benefits to ourselves and peoples of other lands."

"Food," he said, "can be a powerful instrument for all the free world in building

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Eisenhower signed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act in July 1954, allowing developing countries to buy those surpluses on long-term credits. In the 50 years since then, the United States has sent more than 100 million metric tons of aid overseas, according to the United States Agency for International Development, the agency that administers Food for Peace.

Dr. Paarlberg was brought in from academia at the program's inception in 1953 as an economic adviser to the secretary of agriculture. He was named an assistant secretary in 1957 and became the program's coordinator the next year.

Don Paarlberg was born to a farming family in Oak Glen, now Lansing, Ill., and after high school worked at home on the farm for eight years during the Great Depression. He graduated from Purdue University in 1940 and received a master's, in 1942, and a Ph.D., in 1947, from Cornell.

He started his academic career at Purdue in 1946, as an assistant professor of agricultural economics, and was named a full professor the year before he first entered government service. He returned to Purdue as Hillenbrand professor of agricultural economics in 1961 but over the years continued to fill assignments for Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford.

He was an adviser to four secretaries of agriculture and the Ford Foundation. In the early and mid-1970's he was the Agriculture Department's chief economist, often reporting to the public and Congress about crop yields and farm prices.

He was the author or co-author of nine books on agriculture and economic policy. The last of them, written with a nephew, Philip Paarlberg, was "The Agricultural Revolution of the 20th Century," published by Iowa State University Press in 2000.

Through much of his life Dr. Paarlberg also wrote poetry. When he turned 90, he published a volume of his verses, most of them written to his wife, Eva Robertson Paarlberg. They were married in 1940, and she died in 1997.

Dr. Paarlberg is survived by two sons, Don Jr., of Fairfax, Va., and Robert, of Watertown, Mass.; two brothers, Russell, of Magnolia Springs, Ala., and Horace, of

West Lafayette; and a grandson.

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