NEW YORK, March 4... The American Jewish Committee, which has taken an activist role in combatting farm-belt anti-Semitism and extremism, said today that a recent Harris Poll confirmed the AJC's long-held belief that the overwhelming majority of Americans, including financially distressed farmers, rejected anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic myths as an explanation for the farm crisis.

Nevertheless, the AJC added, it is very disturbing to learn that 27 per cent of those polled agreed with the statement that farmers had been exploited by "international Jewish bankers."

"We draw absolutely no comfort from this far-too-high percentage", declared Dr. David M. Gordis, the AJC Executive Vice President. "Sadly, the virus of anti-Semitism remains alive even in the United States. In addition, we believe that as the farm crisis deepens and as the farming community will become increasingly vulnerable to the extremist solutions offered by a host of radical right groups, economic despair and social dislocation traditionally breed bigotry, racism, and anti-Semitism.

"During the past year, the AJC has intensified its activities in the farm belt by working closely with coalitions of religious leaders, the farm community, labor groups, and law enforcement officials. We will intensify our efforts to educate the American public about the myths and dangers of anti-Semitism."

On March 5 in Cincinnatti, the AJC, in cooperation with Protestants and Catholic bodies, will co-sponsor a major conference on anti-Semitism and the farm crisis, and a similar interreligious conference will be held in Wichita, Kansas, on March 20. Dr. Gordis explained:

"Our chapters in the Midwest are active in countering this threat of anti-Semitism, and we have had magnificent cooperation from the decent forces in the farm belt. We are urging the Jewish community to advocate and work for just solutions to the serious problems that farmers currently face. Many of them are truly becoming part of a newly disadvantaged minority.

-More-

Howard I. Friedman, President; Theodore Ellenoff, Chair, Board of Governors; Alfred H. Moses, Chair, National Executive Council; Robert S. Jacobs, Chair, Board of Trustees.

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"If our reading of the history of anti-Semitism has taught us anything, it is that Jews never have the right to be complacent about even the smallest spark of anti-Semitism. A measurement of 27 per cent on the thermometer of anti-Semitism is in fact not small. Lest that spark be ignited, let us unite the overwhelming majority of decent Americans to stamp out the embers."

The American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. Founded in 1906, it combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people everywhere.