

# Farmer advocate, former state Rep. Chuck Brown dies

By Trudi Hahn  
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As an auctioneer in the 1980s, Chuck Brown found himself selling the possessions of his Swift County neighbors during tough times in farm country. As a Minnesota legislator, he did what he could to ease their financial pain.

Brown, a DFLer who served in the state House of Representatives from 1984 to 1996, died Thursday night at a hospital in Appleton, Minn., after becoming ill at the Swift County Fairgrounds in Appleton, said his wife, Becky. He was 52.

Brown, who had not been in ill health, probably had a heart attack, his wife said. He had been the announcer and principal organizer for an antique-tractor-pulling contest Thursday evening. The daytime temperature had reached 90, and dew points were in the 60s.

"He was intense and passionate for rural Minnesota," said former Rep. Doug Peterson, DFL-Madison, who served with Brown in the 1990s and is the current president of the Minnesota Farmers Union. "You didn't have to worry about where Chuck Brown stood for the little guy."

The farm crisis brought tough times to the family farmers in the west-central Minnesota area that Brown represented.

"It was a real depression in the '80s in the district," said Sen. Charlie Berg, R-Chokio. "Rapidly falling land prices and a change in lenders' attitudes — many farmers were facing foreclosures."

Although the two men didn't see eye to eye philosophically, Berg, then a DFL senator in Brown's district, said they worked together on many pieces of farm legislation, including one that provided for mediation between farmers and lenders.

Brown also fought the legalization of bovine somatotropin (BST), a bovine

growth hormone that boosts milk yields in cows. It was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1993.

"I'm very skeptical of the safety of this milk," he said in 1989. "I suspect parents in Minneapolis and St. Paul would be rather skeptical of putting this stuff over their kids' cereal as would parents of kids in rural Minnesota."

After leaving the Legislature in 1996, he became a contract lobbyist for sev-



**Chuck Brown in 1995. He became ill at the Swift County Fairgrounds on Thursday and probably died of a heart attack.**

eral groups, including tobacco giant Philip Morris USA and Otter Tail Power Co. in 1997. Currently, his client list also included groups ranging from a domestic-violence group to the Lac qui Parle Yellow Bank Watershed District.

"He was a very effective lobbyist because he had been on both sides of the chamber door," said Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Madison, son of Doug Peterson.

Aaron Peterson, a freshman legislator, credits Brown with helping get funds for the Lazarus Creek flood control project in Yellow Medicine County, a project designed 30 years ago and politically blocked ever since.

In addition to his wife, Becky, survivors include four daughters, Bridget of St. Paul, Kelsey of Willmar, Minn., and Megan and Katie of Appleton.

Services will be held at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at St. John's Catholic Church in Appleton. Visitation is planned Monday evening at the church.

Staff writer Sharon Schmickle contributed to this report.

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