

★ MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1991

Farmer's friends rally as porn case reaches high court

By JOE RUFF
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEWMAN GROVE, Neb. — A farmer humiliated after buying child pornography in a government sting spent seven months isolated and depressed but said he has regained his self-esteem and wants the Supreme Court to know he was unfairly trapped.

A lawyer for Keith Jacobson, who is backed by friends and neighbors in this east-central Nebraska farming town, is ready to go before the nation's highest court Wednesday to challenge his conviction.

"I think if our government doesn't have anything better to do than this kind of thing, they better get straightened out," farmer Robert Craig Nelsen said last week as he ate lunch at City Cafe.

Mr. Nelsen and the pastor of the church where Jacobson is treasurer said the government went too far in

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an investigation that involved sending Jacobson at least 10 letters from dummy companies and bogus groups advocating sexual freedom.

"I would say that 50 percent of the people in general would do the same thing if they were sent this kind of thing," Mr. Nelsen said. "How would he know this was illegal?"

Jacobson, 61, said he ordered two adult magazines that depicted nude young men and boys in 1984 from a San Diego company. Investigators raided the company and found his name on the mailing list. Over the next 2½ years, undercover postal inspectors sent Mr. Jacobson mail offers for pornography.

He filled out questionnaires but didn't buy anything until 1987, when out of curiosity he ordered a magazine called "Boys Who Love Boys," described in a catalog as "11-year-

old and 14-year-old boys get it on in every way possible."

"I think I was just sort of a gullible person at the time, unaware of the penalties," Jacobson said.

The day he received the magazine, investigators were at his door with a search warrant. They took "Boys Who Love Boys" and the two magazines he ordered by mail in 1984.

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Investigators "are writing letters to these people they assume maybe have some weakness and attempting to lure them into buying an illicit, pornographic magazine which the government themselves makes up," said the Rev. LeRoy Dobbe, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church.

Jacobson, a bachelor, said he is bisexual and bought the magazines in 1984 because he wanted to explore his own sexual orientation and because they included nudity.

"I didn't think there was anything bad about it," he said. "These are magazines that everybody can get."

Justice Department spokesman Frank Kelly wouldn't comment because of the pending appeal. The U.S. Postal Service didn't return messages seeking comment.

Jacobson was convicted in 1988 of receiving child pornography and was sentenced to two years' probation and 250 hours of community service. He lost his job as a school bus driver.

A three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided 2-1 in January 1990 to throw out Jacobson's conviction. Nine months later, the full appeals court reinstated it on an 8-2 vote.

"I was embarrassed and humiliated and depressed," Jacobson said. "I withdrew, pretty much secluded myself and sort of stayed that way for several months."

He said he survived the embarrassment because he wants to fight what the government did. He plans to attend Wednesday's Supreme Court session.

"I think they should determine what the involvement of a person is before they just go out and just destroy him," said Jacobson, who served in the Korean and Vietnam wars and returned to Newman Grove in the mid-1970s.