

# Editor's Desk

**Editor's Note:** Remember Lancaster Farming's article the past summer on Robert Armstrong, the Southern Lancaster County farmer who had outstanding results in his first year with the new crop, triticale? Well, the crop may catch on. Here's the word from the Northeastern Poultry Producers Council in its recent issue of NEPPCO News:

Triticale is a high yielding grain; a cross between wheat and rye developed by Jenkins Foundation for Research in California for use in winning the race against world famine. It was grown this year on farms in Lancaster County, Pa., and Hagerstown, Md. It yields 85 to 100 or more bushels per acre; contains 17 per cent crude protein (9 per cent for corn); 14.6 per cent digestible protein (7.2 per cent for corn); and 80.2 per cent TDN (82.3 per cent for corn). It could

be what we need in the Northeast to combat the high cost of imported grain.

**Editor's Note:** The Golden Guernsey Dairy Co-op has paid a premium for high-protein milk since 1962. The following report on how the protein milk pricing system is working was reported in the January-February issue of The Furrow:

When Stephen Babcock invented the first practical test for milk fat in 1890, he probably didn't realize how important his discovery would be to the dairy industry . . . or how long his simple test would endure.

More than 80 years later, the Babcock butterfat test is still the basis for buying and selling milk—and often for culling cows. But now, there seems to be growing sentiment in favor of paying for milk on the basis of protein content as well as but-

terfat. Advocates of protein pricing offer these reasons:

—Because of health scares and low-priced competition, demand for highfat dairy products has tumbled in the past few decades. At the same time, sales of skim-milk products have soared, and the surplus of skim-milk powder has diminished.

—As a result, the value of nonfat solids (of which protein is the most important and variable part) has increased substantially relative to butterfat. Between January, 1969, and January, 1971, skim values in Class I (bottled) milk went up eight times more than butterfat values in the Chicago federal milk order market.

—Protein has a good ring to it, butterfat doesn't. A protein-pricing plan would give marketers a chance to play up protein and stimulate increased consumption of dairy products.

—Reliable tests for deter-

mining protein content in milk are now available.

Opponents of protein pricing argue that it is debatable whether dairymen can substantially increase the protein content of milk through feeding or breeding. They also say the difference in payments using protein pricing instead of the current system would be only a few cents per hundred—hardly enough to pay for making management changes.

Opponents also raise legitimate questions about who would set the protein standards and whether consumers, in fact, are willing to pay a premium for milk with higher protein.

## 9-Year Test

To try to get answers to some of these questions, the Furrow visited officials and members of the Golden Guernsey Dairy Cooperative in Milwaukee, Wis., which adopted a combined fat-and-protein pricing plan way back in 1962. Producers are now paid a variable premium of from two to three cents for each one-tenth of a per cent of protein over 3.2 per cent.

Protein payments are made from a fund acquired by checking off a flat three cents per hundred on all milk delivered, discounting milk when butterfat levels go above certain fat standards established for each breed, and deducting quality premiums for high bacteria counts. In 1970, the co-op paid out \$132,852 in protein premiums to 250 producers.

"I think the acceptance of protein pricing shows the far-sightedness of our dairymen," says Gavin McKarrow, general manager of Golden Guernsey. "With the emphasis on butterfat diminishing, it seemed proper to start playing up that part of milk solids that people need and want . . . protein. Preaching that milk is healthful is not enough nowadays."

Golden Guernsey links protein with good-tasting milk in its advertising campaigns. McKarrow says protein is one reason Golden Guernsey's 2-per cent-fat sales have tripled since 1962 and the co-op has not found it necessary to take part in local price wars.

While many Golden Guernsey members are working for more protein and less fat, McKarrow says, others feel the protein payments are not high enough to warrant making any management changes. "Part of this because of the emphasis on

fat all these years," McKarrow explains. "But we think we're making headway. On the whole, our protein content has improved."

Gib and Hal Roberts, who milk 123 Guernseys near Wales, Wis., are two of about 20 Golden Guernsey members who test their cows for protein production every other month. They say the herd's average protein is 4.3 per cent, although it fluctuates. It has been as high as 4.6 and as low as 3.5. Extra protein added \$438 to the Roberts' paycheck in 1970.

Alvin Basse, Muskego, Wis., says he has been working for higher protein and lower fat since Golden Guernsey went to protein pricing eight years ago. Basse milks 50 head of Guernseys and farms 250 acres of alfalfa, corn, and oats.

"I've gained a few points each way," says Basse. "In 1963, my herd average was 3.5 per cent protein, 4.6 per cent fat. This year I'm running 3.9 per cent protein and 4.0 per cent fat. Last year my fat was 4.3."

Basse credits his protein progress to protein testing and using the results to cull cows.

"The problem in selecting for higher protein and lower fat is in the bulls. We don't have enough volume here to get the A.I. stations switched to testing for protein. So the only thing I can work with is cow families and that is a very slow process."

Basse does feel protein pricing is a valuable goal for the dairy industry. "You have to produce what the consumer wants. We're not testing for the fun of it. I think protein pricing is more important than the actual dollars we're being paid for it now."

Truman Graf, extension marketing specialist at the University of Wisconsin, and a leading advocate for protein pricing, admits that the dairy industry is making no major effort to change milk-pricing policies at this time. But, he says, interest in protein pricing is at an all-time high and Graf hopes it will be adopted "as soon as possible."

"The psychological advantage in playing up protein and playing down butterfat could help sell more milk at higher prices," Graf says.

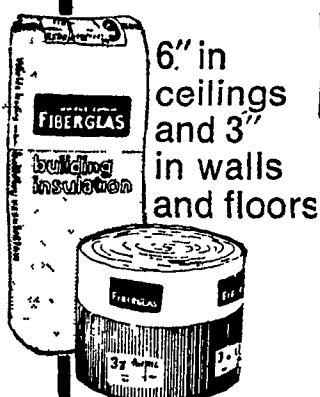
"I think protein pricing could help the whole dairy industry in its struggle to hold and expand markets."



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