

Facts of Meat Supply

Many years ago, there were those who could see the handwriting on the wall as fewer and fewer farmers produced the food supplies for ever-greater numbers of nonfarm people who knew little or nothing about the economics of agriculture. The day would come when lack of farming knowledge would lead to a failure to appreciate certain natural laws of nature.

A spokesman for the livestock industry, Mr. David H. Stroud, president of the National Live Stock and Meat Board, expressed it well when he said lots of people think the supply of beef is automatic and no further away than their favorite food store and that the farmer, packer or retailer "sets" the price. "But that's not so," he observes, "Despite tremendous farm efficiencies, there's no short cut to a choice T-bone steak or a pound of hamburger." It still takes two years to grow the steak or roast you have for dinner, plus 2,500 pounds of grain, 450 pounds of protein supplement and 12,300 pounds of hay, silage and pasture and tremendous substantial investments in

labor and capital before a steer is feedlot-finished and ready for the market at 1,000 pounds. Further, supply and demand set the price for beef regardless of farmer-rancher cost of production. When homemakers buy more beef, supplies are reduced, and prices tend to rise because consumers are bidding against each other for available meat. Over the long pull, however, ranchers have steadily increased beef production—increased it 2.5 times in the last 20 years. Today, beef consumption in the U.S. has more than doubled-up from 56 to 115 pounds per person compared to 20 years ago.

There is only one way that Americans can have the meat supply they will need in the future and that is by adhering strictly to a market-oriented agricultural industry capable of producing abundance in accordance with the laws of supply and demand. This is one of the hard facts of nature there is no dodging. It is a fact with which farmers live everyday of their lives. It is also a fact that many nonfarm consumers have forgotten.

Inflation and Food Costs

As a nation, we have become used to spending a very small portion of our average income on food—around 16 percent. Americans, for the most part, have been spoiled by our agricultural productivity and the efficiency and innovativeness of our food processing and distribution industries. Still, this doesn't change the fact that the average cost of food eaten at home between January, 1972, and January, 1973, rose some 7.6 percent and that rising food prices are sure to cause more public dissatisfaction than similarly rising costs in any other area. Some argue that food prices can be tamed only by rigid controls all the way back to the farm, which would be the most disastrous possible course from the standpoint of consumer welfare. Massive shortages of many food products or rationing and black markets reminiscent of World War II would be the result. Thus it is essential that some facts about food prices become common knowledge.

The general pressure of inflation that continues to increase the dollar cost of everything we buy has, of course, influenced food prices. But they have been nudged upward to an additional extent by the fact that, in the case of a number of key food products, available supply is slightly short, relative to strong demand. There is no way price controls could cure this situation. They would simply reduce the rate of return to farmers and ranchers and make it impossible to invest the money required to increase production. Higher prices will boost production, but it takes time to get new land into use, expand facilities and boost the size of beef and dairy herds. Increased supply cannot come overnight.

Consider the matter of beef prices which, because of the average person's preference for this variety of meat, have been much in the limelight. Growth in beef demand has been greater than expected as the level of affluence in America has risen. This has been a major cause of increased pressure on prices. Also, the price of feed, which accounts for 80 percent of the meat producer's costs, have gone up like an express elevator. The kind of increase in beef production that is needed to meet demand will not come from today's cattle population. That means an additional investment in breeding herds that will produce more beef. That investment will only be made as ranchers receive prices for their cattle that are high enough to encourage such action. Supply, demand,

weather, consumer tastes, massive sales of grain to the Soviet Union, processing, packaging, transportation, cost of labor in retail stores—all of these things and more are part of the cost of food.

Another problem is that most people's dissatisfaction with rising food prices winds up being directed at the local supermarket. But food retailers have been among the hardest hit by the inflationary process because it has not been possible in such a highly competitive industry to pass costs along to consumers as fast as they have occurred. On the average, food chain companies earned 1.41 cents per dollar of sales after taxes during the period 1964-1965. Six years later this figure had dropped to .86 cents; and, by the third quarter of 1972, the average food chain company was earning only .3 cents per dollar of sales.

What it all boils down to is that the forces of inflation all along the line, combined with rising demand for particular food items, has finally hit America's grocery bill just as it has everything else, and no one's getting rich in the process. The one thing that does appear to be certain is that the way to cure the situation is not to further restrict supply by slapping incentive-killing price controls on the nation's food producers. It is a time for a little patience, some understanding of the forces that are at work and some changes in buying habits in the interest of greater economy. Also, it is time for a little faith. There is every reason to believe that the competitive, free marketplace will continue to fill the nation's market baskets at the lowest possible cost, just as it always has done.

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The St. Louis County Medical Society Bulletin states that, "Doctors generally kept increases in their fees below allowed levels during the first year of wage and price controls, a study published in the current issue of Update, a publication of the American Medical Association, reports. Including outpatient care and inpatient surgical procedures, physicians' fees went up 2.3 percent. The allowable ceiling for the increases was 2.5 percent - and only to cover increased costs incurred by physicians. In contrast, the study reports, the average increase in prices for all other services (except medical care) was 3.6 percent. The figures are based on the Consumer Price Index for August, 1972, the first anniversary of controls. The cost of living during the first year of controls went up 2.9 percent."

NOW IS THE TIME . . .

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To Topdress Alfalfa

The harvesting of a bumper crop of alfalfa forage should be the goal of every producer this year. Supplies of quality hay are very low and alfalfa for hay or silage will be a great asset. If the established stand was not fertilized last fall, an application of phosphorus and potash this spring or after the first cutting, should increase yields. Alfalfa is a very heavy feeder of potash and this fertilizer element should be liberally supplied.

To Control Weeds

The problem of weed control has confronted all farmers and gardeners for many generations. In spite of various weed control chemicals, the battle continues to keep the weeds from taking over. All producers are urged to plan a good weed control program in advance of planting time. Weeds compete for moisture, light, and plant food. Good weed control usually means a greater yield. There are too many materials available to discuss in this article, but producers are urged to contact their dealer or the local Extension Office for details.

To Control Woodchucks

This is a good time of the year to be alert for woodchuck (groundhog) signs; the freshly dug holes are more easy to detect. Woodchucks dig extensive underground systems with several surface openings. These holes are potential threats to farm animals and to machinery. Serious accidents have occurred

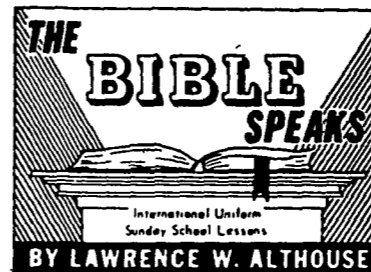
when wheels drop into these woodchuck holes. Even though woodchucks are classed as game animals in Pennsylvania, there are provisions permitting control in farmland. Sport shooting gives some control and the use of gas cartridges in the hold gives additional control. In suburban areas a woodchuck population can be very hard on vegetable gardens.

To Beware Of Herbicide Utensils

Any sprinkling can or sprayer in which 2,4-D weed killer was used last season should still be considered dangerous to use on many plants. This weed killer sticks to equipment for years unless removed by such materials as household ammonia and hot water. Growers and gardeners are urged to be very careful when using 2,4-D. Separate equipment used only for weed killing is suggested. Many vegetable, flower, and tobacco plants have been hurt because of neglect to do a good cleaning job.

Prevent Calf Deaths

One out of every six calves die before birth, during birth, or the first six months of life, reports Donald L. Ace, Extension dairy specialist at The Pennsylvania State University. He notes that calf losses can be kept at a minimum if dairymen can reduce the chill factor in the barn, disinfect calving areas, and feed colostrum at birth.



WHAT GOD'S REALLY LIKE

Lesson for April 1, 1973

Background Scripture: John 1:1-8, 14-18; Acts 10:34-43; Hebrews 1:1-4.
Devotional Reading: Isaiah 42:5-9.

One of the most persistent of man's questions through the ages has been: "What is God really like?"

Men have attempted to answer that question with pictures, statues, temples, scriptures, rituals, and theologies. Usually, however, these attempts



have been something less than satisfying. The varying descriptions of God have often clashed. Others have not been very convincing. Some have been only fragmentary, bits and pieces that give only a partial image.

Partial truth

The Jews pointed to their elaborate system of law and said, "God is like that." The prophets emphasized the themes of justice and righteousness, indicating that the nature of God was to be found in them. And all of these were partly right, but they were also partly wrong.

Three blind men were taken to the zoo to experience their first elephant. Led to the elephant, the first grasped the elephant's trunk and he thereby concluded

that an elephant was shaped like that all over. The second got a hold of his ear, and he concluded that an elephant was thin and flat. The third grasped the elephant's tail and he was sure the elephant was long and thin. Each of these men were partly right, but only partly right.

Often, this is the only way it is with our perception of God. We experience one narrow perspective of God's nature and we unfortunately assume that we have discovered the totality of his nature. Yet, even if you could put together all these views, they still would not add up to an adequate picture.

A reflection of God

So men have constantly been frustrated in their attempts to get an adequate composite picture. Thus they were still searching when God sent his own Son so that that question could be answered once and for all. Two New Testament writers approach the same truth from two different perspectives.

The writer of Hebrews proclaims: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature. . . ." (1:1-3).

The writer of John's gospel tells us: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth . . . No one has ever seen God; the only Son . . . he has made him known" (John 1:14, 18).

What both of these witnesses are saying is that the only way we can have an adequate picture of what God is really like, is to look to Jesus. In his personality, his nature, we come face to face with the height, depth, length, and breadth of what we mean when we use the term "God."

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