

Consumers Blame Middlemen for Prices

Farmers and food retailers, in general, receive the least blame for high costs of food, according to a national survey of consumer reactions to prices. The study was reported today by Dr. Rex H. Warland and Dr. Robert O. Herrmann, sociologist and economist with the Agricultural Experiment Station at The Pennsylvania State University. They directed the analysis from University Park.

The blame for high prices fell most heavily on groups usually considered the middlemen, food manufacturers and labor unions. Farmers, food retailers, and food manufacturers were not blamed by any particular consumer group. However, labor unions were mentioned more by men than by women as causing high food prices. Owners of businesses

and white collar workers blamed unions to a greater degree for high prices than did skilled and unskilled workers.

Surprisingly, union members and others in the same household were just a likely to mention labor unions as contributing to higher food costs as persons not belonging to unions.

At the same time, Warland and Herrmann point out, no one group was singled out for creating high prices. No group was named by over half of the respondents even though they could name as many groups as they wished.

Drs. Warland and Herrmann say persons who apparently didn't know whom to blame for increasing food prices were those hurt most by high costs. They found this same pattern in several other studies. Those who didn't know were usually those in greatest need - but they knew least what was happening, why it was happening, or what to do about it.

The study analyzed a random sampling of 1235 people throughout the United States. The sampling gave a representative cross section of America population on factors such as race, age, occupation, and region of the country. The analysis was made several months ago.

The project found consumers upset about the cost of numerous other goods and services. Complaints about the high cost of medical services provided by hospitals were close behind the comments on food prices. Eighty per cent of the sample said medical service costs were too high.

About 70 per cent of the people sampled thought automobiles, doctor services, and drugs and medicines were priced too high. In contrast, only 40 per cent said that major appliances were too costly.

Obviously, concern over rising prices is increasing. Earlier surveys made in the summer and fall of 1971 indicated that about 65

per cent of the people surveyed thought food cost too much. The recent survey found this figure

had risen to 85 per cent.

Widespread consumer unrest and dissatisfaction could result in

increasing demands for governmental action, Warland and Herrmann observe.

Fix-It Tip

Electric motors that run hot or slow may be in need of lubrication. Follow manufacturer's instructions. Small appliances generally need frequent oiling. Use the oil sparingly.

Usually just a drop of oil is needed at each oiling point each time. Large motors may need oiling once or twice a year. If the motor is in a sealed housing, leave it alone — it is self-lubricating.

Heating and rapid wear of motors are caused by dirt. Wipe motors frequently and vacuum out accumulations of dust.

Check belts and pulleys (if the motor has them) for excessive wear. Slipping belts may cause inefficient operation of your appliances.

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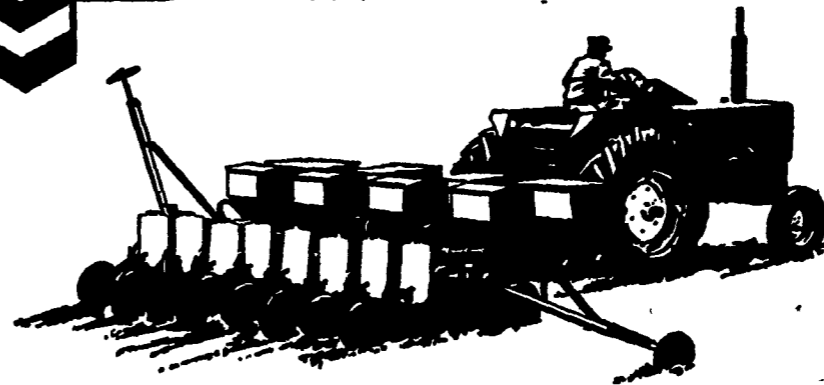
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