

From Local Ag Teachers:



Thoughts in Passing



In Defense
Throughout the past week I attended several meetings and luncheons with professions other than agriculture. A common conversation topic on which everyone seemed to have an

opinion was the exorbitant cost of meats and other food products. Unfortunately, much of the discussion was not in defense of the farmer but rather in accusation of the farmer as the villain enjoying prosperity at the



Glenn S. Weber

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expense of the consumer.

One cannot deny that food prices have been on the increase. For example, a "market basket" of food produced on U.S. farms—enough to supply the average urban household for a year—now costs \$1,375. That is \$102 more than the figures for a year earlier. Of this \$102 increase, farmers are getting \$85 while the remaining \$17 is going to the middlemen who process, distribute and sell the food.

However, in the 10-year period from 1961 through 1971 the cost of a "market basket" of food increased by only \$252. Of this increase \$94 went to the farmer while \$158 went to the middlemen. So it appears that the farmer is getting his share of the latest food price increase.

The cost of fresh meat is a leading cause for the recent increase in the cost of the "market basket". Some cuts of beef and pork are selling for 20 to 50 cents more per pound at meat counters than a year ago. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, overall food prices rose by 4.3 per cent in 1972 and are estimated to

be increasing by 6.5 to 7 per cent in the first few months of 1973.

What we must realize, however, is that even with the big run-up in food prices, the farmer still gets only one-third of each dollar American families spend on food. This share came to 33.4 cents in 1972. Consequently only a portion of the high retail price for food is passed on to the farmer.

Yet, when food prices increased by 4.3 per cent last year, the farmer's costs rose more than 7 per cent. The farmer who has to buy soybean meal to feed his livestock finds that its sky-high costs demands higher prices for his products—not to mention the price of feeder cattle. The farm operator with a small marginal spread does not have the volume of sales needed to offset these high production costs which somehow manage to increase faster than the prices the farmer receives for his products. The fact was difficult for my non-agricultural friends to comprehend.

In one isolated case, it took a boycotting lady from the city of Atlanta just six hours of routine hard work on a hog farm in Iowa to realize that the farmer deserves the right to make a profit, as does any business.

So for the farmer, the rising tab at the supermarket check-out counter is not a rare bonanza of super profits. For too many years, farmers were last in line when profits from food sales were divided up. Now the rising costs of production necessitates the farmer getting a larger share of the food industries' profits.

May the consumer be comforted by the fact that in the U.S., she spends 17.6 per cent of her consumer dollar for food as compared to Europe where she would spend 40 to 54 per cent of her consumer dollar for food.

Glenn S. Weber
Agriculture Teacher
Manheim Central High School

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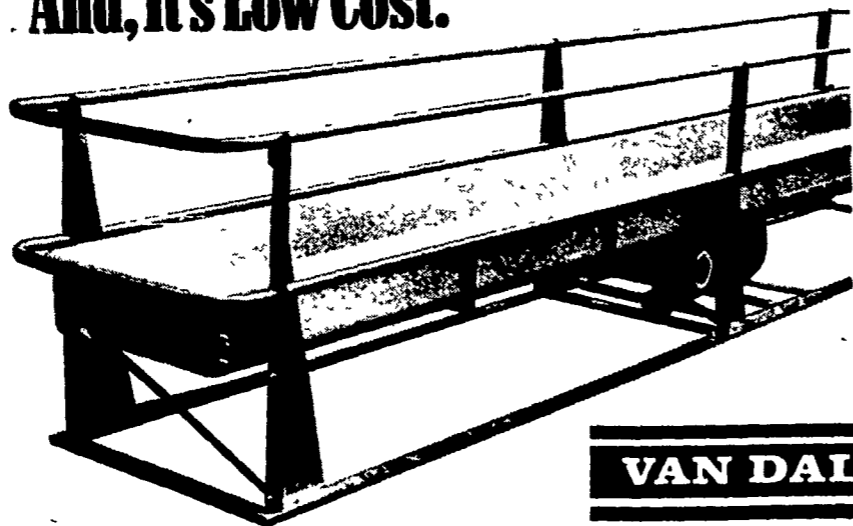
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