

Policy Reminder Issued On Meat Packer Practices

Meat packers who feed livestock on a custom basis and those who sell livestock to other packers may face charges of violating the Packers and Stockyards Act, the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) said

Marvin L. McLain, Administrator of USDA's Packers and Stockyards Administration (P&SA), said this public reminder is being given so all packers will fully understand the applicability of the P&S Act to such operations.

Custom feeding is the feeding and finishing for market of livestock owned by others, either on a fee basis or by charges for services and feed. Custom feedlots may also purchase feeder cattle for the actual owners, and then sell the livestock for the owner when they are finished and ready for market

Packers are not prohibited from feeding their own livestock for their own slaughter purposes.

"The historical position of our agency," McLain said, "has been to regard the practice by packers of feeding livestock on a custom basis, and the selling of livestock to another packer or another buyer, as violations of the P&S Act.

"If we find that any packer operates or controls a custom feedlot, or sells livestock to others, we will consider formal administrative action charging violation of the P&S Act."

McLain pointed out there has been a major change in the marketing of fed cattle throughout the United States in recent years. In the past, finished

cattle were marketed primarily through terminal stockyards, auction markets, or directly by an independent feeder of cattle. Recently, however, large numbers of cattle are being finished in large commercial feedlots on a custom-feeding basis, and sold directly to packers. This has made feedlots a major marketing channel for finished cattle.

McLain said his agency is concerned that if packers gain control of custom feedlots, they would control the marketing facilities for a major share of slaughter livestock, as well as control of selling and buying functions and other marketing services. The elimination of such packer control of stockyards and marketing facilities was one of the primary objectives of the Packers and Stockyards Act, enacted in 1921.

Also noted has been a trend for packers to buy feeder cattle, have them fed under contract or in their own facilities, and then sell the finished cattle to competitor packers or other buyers. The potential for manipulation of markets and restriction of competition in such a situation is great, McLain said.

The Packers and Stockyards Administration, which administers the P&S Act, reported there have been no serious problems so far, but said the reminder is considered necessary in view of growing trends. The restatement of P&SA policy is intended to allow packers to voluntarily comply with provisions of the P&S Act, and eliminate the need for formal action.

The P&S Act regulates business practices of those in livestock and live poultry marketing and meat and poultry packing to foster free and open competition in the marketplace.

The Act is intended to safeguard farmers and ranchers from marketing practices which would deprive them of true market value for their livestock and poultry; protect members of the industry from unfair, deceptive, unjustly discriminatory or monopolistic practices of competitors; and protect consumers against unfair business practices in the marketing of meats and poultry.

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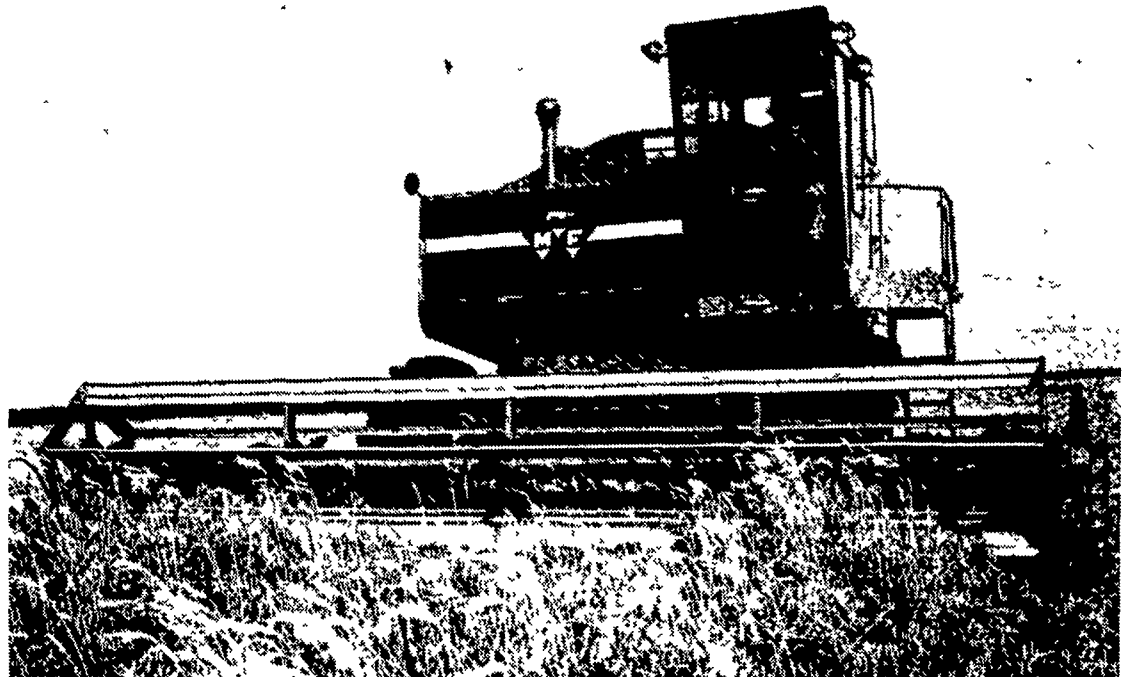
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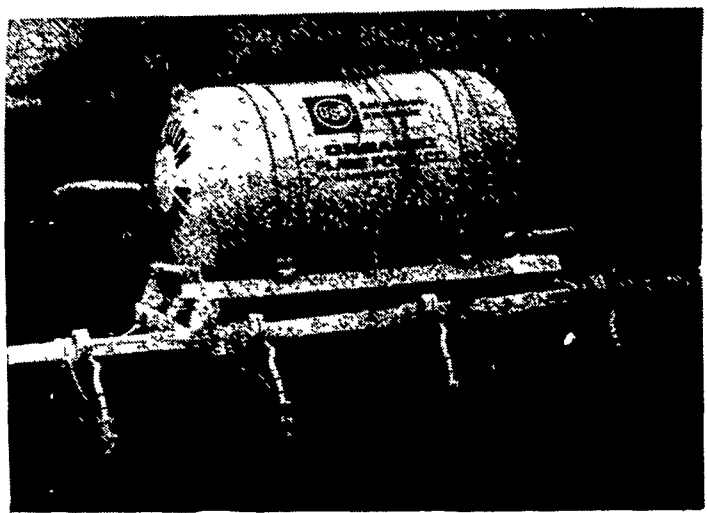
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