

From Local Ag Teachers:



Thoughts in Passing



The article this week was prepared by Glenn Weber, teacher of agriculture, Manheim Central High School.

**FOOD — A BARGAIN
IN DISGUISE**

Food prices on an absolute scale have risen over the last years. As one consumer

stated, "Food prices are so high that they are burning holes in the pockets of the consumer."

I'd like to consider three main areas of the food price problem. First, who is to blame for high food prices? Secondly, why have prices risen as they have, and

finally, what can we as consumers do to adjust to these new prices?

As a teacher and farmer, I have had an opportunity to witness the farm and food price controversy from both sides. I have been appalled at the apparent lack of knowledge of the producer's point of view on the part of both the urban consumer and those who have tried in the past to administer price controls.

In the early part of 1973 farm prices started to increase. In January, February, and March farmers began to respond to these higher prices the way they had responded to price increases before -- by gearing up to produce more food and fiber than this country could ever consume. Then by last March and April something changed the

farmers to keep back heifer replacements, breed and calve them, feed out the calves and send the cattle to market, slaughter them and put the products on the supermarket shelf. The calves that are now following their mothers in the hills of Virginia, West Virginia, Kansas and elsewhere will be the products in the supermarket in a year and a half from now. Because they didn't understand agriculture, we had a number of boycotts, freezes, ceilings and intimidations from the consuming public. What they didn't know is that we could not pass a law and

increase the beef on the supermarket shelf next week. We could not increase the meat supply by freezing beef prices anymore than we can solve teacher shortage with a ceiling on teacher wages. All the freezes, ceilings, and boycotts did was to discourage the farmer and widen the gap of understanding between the producer and consumer.

Well, who is to blame? The farmer claims his costs of production have more than doubled in the past ten years while his prices paid to him have not. The consumer claims that it is impossible

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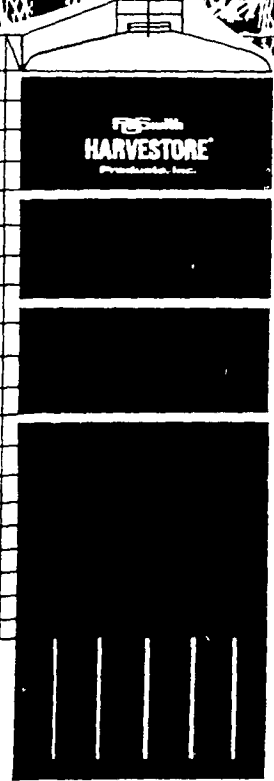
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Glenn Weber
farmers response to these higher prices. The consumer became impatient. We started to hear about food price freezes, boycotts and consumer organizations against the food producers for lower prices. May I suggest that those consumer groups responsible for the upheaval last April and May really didn't understand our food marketing system. They thought that in 2 or 3 months a farmer could increase his supply of meat to the food stores. But as we know, two to three months is just not ample time for

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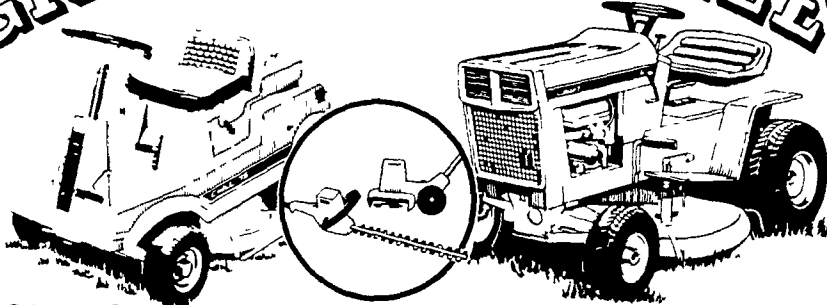
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