

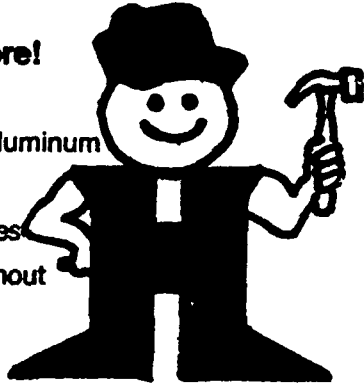
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From Local Ag Teachers:



By: Cliff Grube
Agriculture Instructor
Warwick High School

This is election time, and it is now more than ever that we hear the candidates promise to ease our woes. One of the overwhelming concerns today is food prices. Some candidates are calling for a halt of agricultural exports and relaxed import restrictions so that food will be plentiful and cheap.

I doubt, however, that food will ever be cheap again for when live cattle prices dropped the middleman picked up the slack and little of this decline was realized on a retail level. If raw farm prices increase, a much larger increase results on the retail level giving the middleman a convenient scapegoat. This difference between the farmer's price and what the consumer pays is called the "price spread". This widened by an average of 21 percent between 1973 and 1974.

It is the food industry who wants exports restricted and imports relaxed because they want to further their margin at the farmer's expense. We are the ones asked to make a sacrifice while others fatten their profits. We can tell our story, we can ask for compassion. We can slaughter our calves to bring attention to the problem, but today's buyer

Thoughts in Passing



is too far removed from the farm scene to really understand. They are three or more generations removed from the land and have no idea what hogs are worth, what fertilizer costs or even that cows must be milked every day, and they probably don't care as long as their food bill levels off.

My point is this. If the farmer doesn't look after the farmer, no one else will. We have no guarantee of fair prices for our products, and our markets are being eroded by government policy. We have been asked to shoot for all out production next year in order to lower food prices. I want you to think about that statement for a moment. In other words, during a time when our costs are skyrocketing we are supposed to work harder so that we can receive less. I think this is more than "biting the bullet". The American Farmer has been the most productive worker in our nation and our efficiency surpasses anything in industry, and this is how we are rewarded.

Most farmers I know love to produce, and we measure our proficiency by that of yield, but I think the time has come that we must exercise a great deal of caution or we'll once again produce

ourselves into poverty. This has happened many times in the past especially with hogs and poultry. For once in history due to the low carryover of grain, the grain farmer has some leverage in the market place. The Texas wheat growers showed real strength and unity last spring and held their grain off the market until the price suited them. The livestock producers can do the same by cutting back on cow numbers etc. although the effect will be slower to realize.

Most Lancaster County farmers are livestock feeders and are purchasers rather than sellers of grain. Therefore, it is not uncommon to hear one say "corn is too high". I don't

think this is the real problem at all. I think meat, milk and eggs are too low. The grain farmer never made much money and at today's costs of land, fertilizers, chemicals and equipment he never again can afford to sell corn at \$1.25 per bushel.

We must be guaranteed good markets and fair prices in order to produce, and if our government won't back us up when prices drop, we have no choice other than to limit production rather than expand it.

Definition

COWARD: one who in a perilous emergency thinks with his legs.

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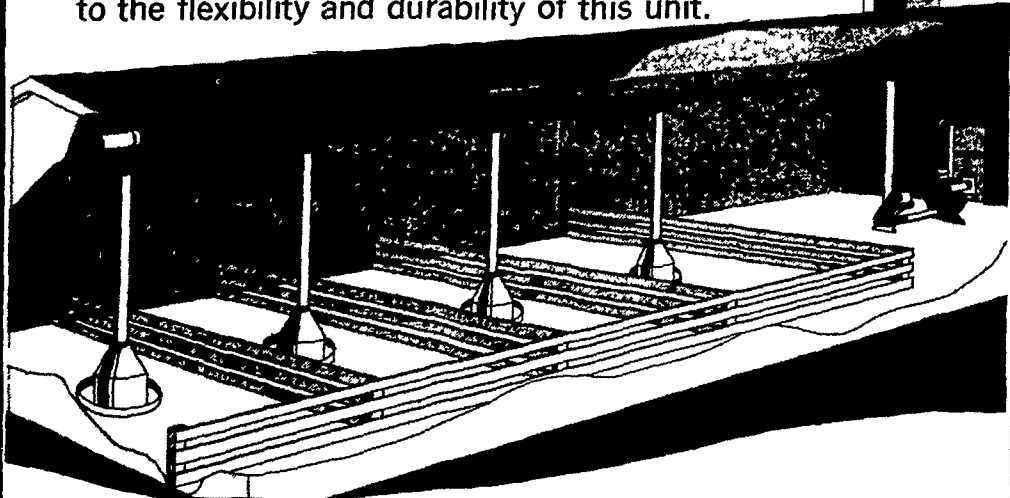
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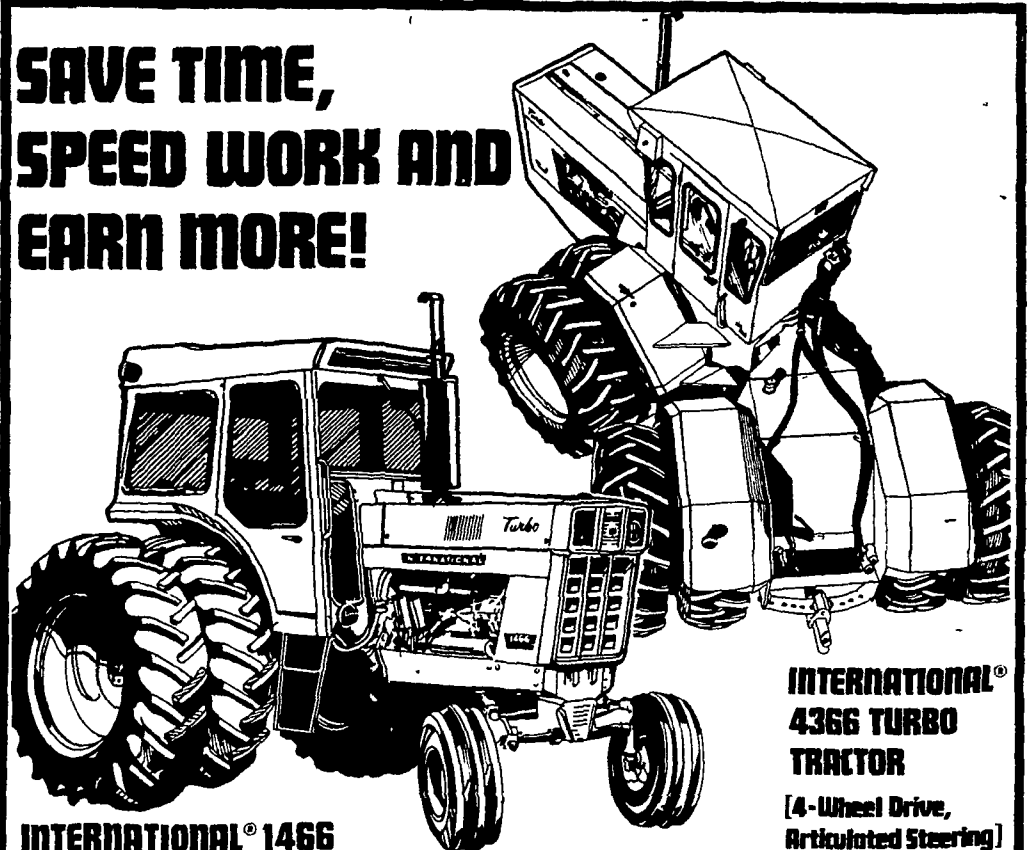


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