

# A Farming Couple Discuss the Economy

by: Melissa Piper  
Like many other young farmers, Gerald Erb of Mt. Joy R1, has been concerned with the state of the economy and what effect it will have on the farmers as well as the average consumer. Although

he has his own convictions, Erb never voiced his opinion until last week when he invited this reporter to his dairy farm where he and his wife Judy expressed how they as a young farming couple view the problem of

the economy and its effect on their lives.  
Gerald Erb, purchased his first dairy animals at the age of 14 with money he had earned selling asparagus door to door for his family. Following his graduation



For Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Erb, Mt. Joy R1, adding up the bills hasn't been an easy job but one that

requires attention if their dairy operation is to continue efficiently.



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from high school, Erb bought a farm that belonged to his parents and went into the dairy business hoping it would be successful enough to support his wife and later his children also.

Since that time, Erb has seen many changes in the economy and discussed the problems in a definite manner.

"I feel, man's greed is the cause of world wide inflation. Man has only himself to fear. Love thy neighbor as thyself has been one of our failures as a Christian nation."

One specific incident that bothered Erb was the Administration's act of exporting grain in 1973.

"In 1973 the American dollar fell to an all time low on the world market so the administration exported grain at a world record in order to improve the balance of payment and inflate the dollar," he commented.

"In return, the poor of this country paid the bill of

payment by higher food costs."

Erb went on to explain what inflation means to the farmer.

"Inflation for the farmer is fuel that has doubled, interest rates going from 7½ percent to 10¼ percent, utilities and seed that has doubled, fertilizer that has tripled and baler twine that has gone from \$7.-\$34. in just one season."

"When profits that would normally be put back in as operating capital cannot be had, the farmer must cut costs and when you cut costs, production is cut, bringing higher prices to the consumer."

The Erbs feel that most consumers just don't really understand the economic turmoil present and future of agriculture.

"Most consumers blame the farmer's for the high cost of food but do not realize that the middlemen often drive up costs as well as the consumer wants."

Mrs. Erb stated her point of view concerning consumer demands by explaining where some of the cost problems lie hidden.

"Before consumers complain about the cost of food, they should take a look at what they are buying."

"Many people prefer to spend most of their time out of the kitchen and thus buy specially prepared food that takes short time periods to fix."

"These special foods, like frozen dinners do cost more, not for the food but the convenience."

The Erbs feel it would be more logical for consumers to buy directly from the farmer and avoid the cost of the middlemen and wholesalers.

"Consumers would find costs less if they bought directly from the farmer, such as butchered beef and vegetables"

"If more consumers bought in this manner, the supermarkets and the wholesalers would have to keep their prices competitive."

Although the idea seems like a good and intelligent step against high food prices, the Erbs agreed that most consumers still want con-

veniences.

What can be done to change their attitudes? The Erbs feel that people will soon have to begin reevaluating the important things in life.

"Food will soon have to come before two cars and luxuries."

"Most farm families can't afford luxuries urban dwellers seem to have, yet they have gotten along before and will continue to."

Running their dairy operation as efficiently as possible for profit returns, has been the goal of the Erb's although it has not always been as helpful as it could be.

Like many other dairy farmers, Erb was caught up in the dilemma of assessment when the Le-Hi co-op, where he was selling his milk, collapsed, leaving him with a deficit in profits.

And although he is now guaranteed \$7.80 per hundredweight for his Order 4 milk products, Erb still makes just enough with his dairy herd.

"I couldn't live on just my milk check," Erb admitted, and has recently begun other enterprises to supplement the dairy operation.

Selling butchered beef, grain and firewood has helped although Erb still believes given the right conditions and help he could make money from just the dairy enterprise.

Why then has Gerald Erb and many other young farmers continued their work on the land? Erb described it in this manner.

"I like farming, it has been a way of life in my family for many generations."

"It makes you feel something to know that your family has been tied to the land making it work to support you and your family."

"Maybe I'm not making financial gains on paper by dairy farming, but I have something that few others could ever appreciate"

Erb added that he feels a need to produce as much on his land as he can so that others might benefit from it.

"We should be willing," Erb explained "to put our talents to work rather than under a bushel"



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