

Farm Commentary

Pass the eraser, please

USDA's Economic Research Service estimates that the sales of U.S. grain that have been made by the Soviet Union thus far this year — versus no sales at all — will add about 75 cents per bushel to the price of wheat and 30 cents per bushel to the price of corn. The Department claims to have been planning on sales to Russia "all along."

A USDA news release, dated August 21, says "little impact on consumer food prices is expected in 1975 from sales to the Soviet Union. The 75-cent increase in the price of wheat will add about 0.6 per cent to the retail price of food crops. The 30 cent increase in the price of corn will increase livestock product prices slightly. The over-all effect will be to increase retail food prices by less than 1½ per cent, largely in 1976."

It didn't take long for USDA to revise those figures. Agriculture Secretary Butz was quoted as predicting a nine per cent climb yet

this year. The revised figures were released just a day later.

Reading between the lines of these reports, I get the feeling that government officials are trying to keep the citizens relatively calm — by way of creating an air of confusion with the controversial figures.

If nothing else, it tells me the pencil-pushers and computer programmers don't really know what they're doing. Who ever heard of giving one answer today and one that's six times that size a day later. What's more, Arthur Burns, Federal Reserve Board Chairman, was still thinking about USDA's 1½ per cent figure two days after Butz changed it to nine per cent. He felt the 1½ per cent figure wasn't quite high enough, apparently not knowing that Butz had raised the figure to nine per cent.

Gentlemen in Washington, if farmers made that many mistakes in their business, we'd all be hungry.

Up one side, down the other

Food prices may have gone up a lot higher than they did, if it weren't for a drop in farm prices, a USDA communications letter points out. Farm prices have dropped in six of the last 10 months (August-June), and in June of this year they were lower than August 1974. During this same period, the consumer price index for food increased seven per cent, as did all items less food.

USDA further reports wholesale grain prices to have increased this summer, but in July they were still 11 per cent below a year ago. This was during a period when all industrial commodities increased 12 per cent from July 1974 to July 1975. Prices paid to farmers increased 11 per cent during this same period.

Feeding the masses

Information received here concerning a USDA study on wheat and bread prices indicates a 25 per cent rise in wheat prices would add less to the cost of a loaf of bread than a four per cent increase in the processing and distribution costs.

A special USDA study in 1973 showed that the net farm value of the wheat in a loaf of white bread accounted for 4.1 cents of the 27.6-cent average cost of a one-pound loaf of bread that year. The labor cost to move a loaf of bread from the bakery to retail store cost 4.52 cents, which is more than the farmer received for the wheat in the loaf.

The 1973 study showed that the net farm value of the wheat in a one-pound loaf of white bread represented about 15 per cent of the retail cost of bread. A list of the major costs in a one-pound loaf costing 27.6 cents in 1973 is printed below.

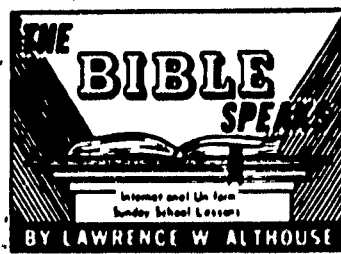
Item	Cost
Net farm value of wheat	4.1
Processing, distribution, and other	23.5
Labor	10.75
Profit	1.34

Advertising	1.23
Packaging	1.14
Depreciation	0.62
Transportation	0.51
Business taxes	0.33
Rent	0.22
Energy	0.21
Repairs	0.17
Interest	0.15
Other	6.80

A bushel of wheat provides the flour for about 70 one-pound loaves of white bread. A one dollar per bushel change in the price of wheat affects the net farm value of the wheat ingredients in a one-pound loaf of white bread about 12 cents.

Farm wheat prices would have to more than double to add as much to the cost of a loaf of bread as last year's increases in processing and distribution costs added to bread prices in 1974.

When Russia purchased huge amounts of wheat from the United States in 1972, the price of a pound of bread subsequently went up 109 cents. Higher farm prices for wheat accounted for only one cent of that, the USDA study shows.



WHERE ARE YOU GROWING?

Lesson for August 31, 1975

Background Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48; 2 Timothy 1:3 through 2:7.

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

Some time ago I saw a bumper-sticker that asked: **WHEN YOU GET WHERE YOU'RE GOING, WHERE WILL YOU BE?** It is a very provocative question.

Some of us, upon reflecting on it, would have to admit that we're not aware of "going" anywhere. We don't think of our lives as moving toward any goal or destination. We are just living day by day, and we have given little thought beyond that.

The Buried Gift

Many of us are like the unprofitable servant in the Parable of the Talents who didn't seem to realize that he was expected to do something fruitful with the talent given him. When his master returned, he handed back the talent as he had received it. Nothing had been accomplished with it, he had earned no profit or interest.

So it is with those intangible gifts that God gives to each of us. We are not expected to return them as we have received them, but with some kind of growth or profit. God expects growth with everything he gives us.

This is no less true with our Christian experience. Jesus said, "You, therefore, must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This admonition is not so much concerned with attaining perfection as it is with growing in that direction. We are called to always strive toward that goal.

What about you? Where are you growing?

A Measuring-Stick

Before we can determine whether we are growing, here are some of the questions we might use as measuring-sticks: Is your relationship to God any deeper or mature than it was five years ago? Have you learned any valuable lessons as you've encountered challenges and your problems along the way? Is the presence of God any more recognizable in your life than it was when you first became a Christian? Have you made any headway in coping with some of your weaknesses and liabilities? Are you more loving and compassionate toward other people, particularly those who are not especially "lovable"? Have you grown in your ability to share your faith with others? Have you grown in your usefulness to others? Do you have any better understanding of your faith than you did as a youth? Are you more fun to live with? Have you grown more Christlike? Don't be content to stay as you are. Christ calls you to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Timothy 1:6).

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NOW IS THE TIME...

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To Test Soils

I still come in contact with many property owners who undertake the seeding of a new lawn, or the renovation of an old lawn, without taking the time to run a complete soil test. They want to know how much lime to apply and what analysis of fertilizer to use in order to get a good lawn. To make these applications without a complete soil test is surely guessing and is not the best way to proceed. We continue to insist that soil testing (and forage testing) is very worthwhile and do not cost money, but saves money. We promote the idea of running complete soil tests on fields, gardens, and lawns before any attempt is made on the actual seeding operation. Seeds cost money and some are very scarce; they warrant the very best of soil preparing and growing conditions.

To Delay

Cutting Alfalfa

For the past few years we have promoted the practice of not cutting alfalfa in this part of the state during the first two weeks in September. We continue to support this recommendation and caution alfalfa growers not to cut until after the middle of September. Alfalfa experts relate that alfalfa plants are developing new roots (rhizomes) during the September at this time will reduce the strength of the roots and reduce yields the following year. Even though the third cutting comes into bloom during early September it will do no harm to wait until after September 15 to take the crop. In addition, third cuttings that have already been made might grow sufficiently to get the fourth cutting in October after a killing frost.

To Fertilize Lawns

Property owners desiring to improve their lawns for next summer might make the first step by fertilizing early in September. This is the time of the year when the plants can be strengthened with the proper amount of lime and fertilizer, and be ready for maximum growth next spring. The amount of lime and fertilizer should be determined by a complete soil test. Many lawn authorities recommend a fertilizer application in the fall and in the spring for good root development and desired grass growth. Lawns that are to be renovated, or new seedings to be made, should be done during early September in order to benefit from the cooler weather and extra moisture of the fall months.

To Seed Cover Crops

Fall is a good time to seed a cover crop in land that is not to be seeded to fall grains. Some gardeners could benefit from a cover crop that will be plowed

down or spaded into the topsoil next spring. Land should not be left open or bare over the winter months because both wind and water erosion will remove some of the topsoil. Any of the winter grains may be used as a cover crop, field brome grass, or domestic ryegrass. In addition, the cover crop when incorporated into the topsoil next spring will increase the organic matter content and improve the soil. Heavy clay soils that get hard and crusty after being wet will benefit most from cover crops. Good soil management suggested a cover crop for the winter months.

Farm Calendar

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, Sept. 3
Lancaster County Conservation District meeting at 7:30 p.m. at the Farm and Home Center.

Friday, Sept. 5
5-13 York Interstate Fair at the York Fairgrounds in York.

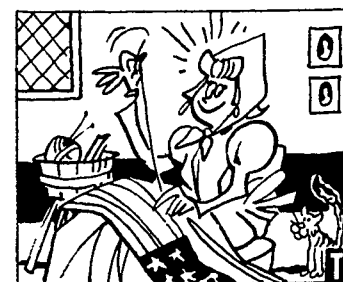
Saturday, Sept. 6
Pa. Dutch Farm Festival in Lancaster County. Continuing through the 7th. Demonstrations open at 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 10
Lancaster County Vo-Ag teachers meeting at 4:30 p.m. at Solanco High School.

Thursday, Sept. 11
Goat club fanciers organizational meeting at the Schuylkill County Coop Extension office at 7:30 p.m.



Betsy Ross Or Accident?



Many Americans still believe that Betsy Ross made the first flag, although historians dispute this story. Another disputed story, according to the US Marine Corps Reserve, is that the first Stars and Stripes displayed in the face of an armed enemy was at Fort Schuyler, August 3, 1777. The flag was improvised. The white part came from a soldier's shirt, a captain's cloak supplied the blue of the union, and the red stripes came from the flannel petticoat of a soldier's wife, who gladly donated it for the purpose.

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Released by Community Press Service.)