

New beef

(Continued from Page 1)

pay for yours," he told the men from Washington. On another instance, the outspoken individual shouted that cattlemen and packers didn't need Washington to tell them how to raise and butcher cattle. Grabbing himself by the seat of his pants, he said: "If a cattleman is doing something wrong, his bank will remind him!"

After the meeting was over, and only a handful of people remained in the smoke-filled arena, McCoy made what might have been the most realistic statement of the evening. "It bothers me that something like this wasn't done six months ago," he began, "all this time there was nothing but general apathy on the matter, and now that it's to come into effect, they're all up in arms about it."

And so it was that Wednesday evening as many farmers and packers openly voiced their opinions while a good many more simply grumbled. The cigar smoke in the room could well represent a cloudy issue and heated tempers.

Just what is the new meat grading system all about? According to Paul Fuller and Fred Williams, USDA men who were on hand to explain the new grades, the new standards would, in effect, increase the number of cattle graded "choice" by 14 per cent. This figure assumes that cattle would continue to be fed the same way in the near future as they were this past year. The "prime" grade would increase from a present 4.5 per cent to 6.6 per cent. The "good" grade, however, would see a drop from 39 per cent to 21. "Standard" cattle would nearly triple. In terms of dollars, it could add up to less money in the cattlemen's pockets. It should be of interest to all cattlemen across the country to see how sellers and buyers react to the change next week. One man predicted a light run for Monday's auction, here, expecting many cattlemen to hold back and see what happens. But he quickly added that in a situation like this one never really knows for sure how people will react.

With lower prices expected for the type of cattle we up until Sunday referred to as "choice" or "prime," it's not hard to understand why cattlemen here are opposed to the plan. Housewives reportedly do not want the change either, and according to many sources, they have nothing to gain by the revised standards. Packers in this part of the country would like to see the proposals scrapped.

But in spite of the opposition — and there is a lot of it all across the country — USDA is going ahead with the plan which it first proposed a year ago. Since that time the Department has received 4549 comments from the public and four petitions which included more than 7,000 names. To say that the issue is still smoldering would be an understatement — it's roasting, and is likely to continue to do so for as long as three years. Court battles have been fought and another big one came up in Dallas, Tex. on Thursday. The results of it were not known to Lancaster Farming by press time.

Fuller, department head of USDA's market news; and Williams, from the department of beef standardization, both indicated that their Department had considerable support from the beef industry. But they did not deny the existence of opposition. Considering the changes as a whole, 43 per cent of the comments presented to Washington favored all proposals, and each point individually was favored by a large majority, as they put it. Where does support for the controversial proposal come from?

Mostly from big packing companies in the Far West, Fuller and Williams answered. Beyond that, backing has also come from several cattlemen's organizations. Although this report

can't verify it, comments were made Wednesday night that some of the exotic beef breeds were pushing for the changes. Whether or not these breeds will benefit was not said, but the one group which should benefit are those who have specialized in selling Holsteins for meat.

The point was made by Williams that housewives will indeed be able to have advantages with the new grading standards. Namely, they will be able to purchase a "good" grade of beef with more reliability than was the case before. The new grades of "choice" and "prime" should also be cheaper — in theory at least. The changes in grading are said to be more competitive with each other now while not sacrificing anything on palatability. USDA says the new standards will represent leaner beef with high quality.

The "leaner beef" question is one which is particularly irritating to local cattlemen and buyers. For years they have bred, fed, raised, and managed their cattle to come up with the kind of cuts which USDA is now allegedly "discriminating" against. As stated earlier, McCoy believes this could be detrimental to the industry. A farmer in the audience noted that: "We have been providing the consumers with the kind of beef they want and they're the ones who are paying for it, why change it now?" The majority opinion here was that the industry in this part of the country, at least, is stepping on thin ice.

In pondering the situation, cattlemen (both farmers and packers) questioned USDA's motives, some of the research which was done, and the goals which are to be reached. More than one individual suspected that the changes were made to make more grain available for export to Russia. Studies cited by USDA reveal that present highest grading standards require 245 pounds more grain. In other words, the new grades of "choice" and "prime" aren't finished to the degree they used to be. The savings in grain could be exported then. The World Council of Churches was backing this plan, one individual commented.

One of the most objectionable and major points of the USDA proposal which eastern cowboys and packers find difficult to swallow is the part about "yield grading." Carcasses will be graded for quality, the same as ever, and also "yield," which is relatively new to some concerns. The objection stems from the fact that the system allegedly discriminates against fat and marbling qualities which had always been thought of as highly desirable. A yield grade of "1" is the best theoretically possible, although most concede it's impossible. A yield grade of "5" is supposedly the worst of the bunch. Simply put, it concerns the fat trimmings which USDA now categorizes as waste and undesirable. The goal is supposedly a leaner carcass. One farmer raised this question: "Does this mean we'll be raising an entire generation of kids who won't know what a good piece of meat tastes like?" In line with this, it was pointed out that restaurant associations and retail super markets were against the new proposals. Ironically, many of them had actually been hoping for a grading system which would have gone in the opposite direction.

The man who was getting the most criticism for the proposal — even though he was not present in person — was John Pierce, head of USDA's livestock division. He's supposedly the man who cooked up the idea of revising the meat grading system. Marshall likened the new grading system to changing Chevrolets to Cadillacs in name only without changing anything else, and pointedly criticized and questioned USDA's and Pierce's knowledgeability. "Pierce is playing with his toys and he wants everyone to play his way, and if we don't he will take his toys home," he said disgustedly. His remarks often generated laughter, nods of agreement, and mumbles.

According to USDA, 85 per cent of the meat which is now quality graded is also yield graded anyway. The Department has had the program since 1962 and in Williams' words, it's been "coming on like gangbusters since 1965." That

FFA's in corn contest



Four members of the Cloister FFA recently participated in the Pa. Crop Improvement Association's corn contest. Members included (counterclockwise) Harry Leininger, Cliff Martin, Marty Hoover and Kerry Boyd.

argument didn't seem to convince too many. Again and again, the practical, dollars and cents side of the question was brought up. Marshall asked: "Will this put any dollars in the producers' pocket?" The indication was yes — due to reduced levels of grain feeding, but this was questioned since beef prices could drop as a result of a higher concentration of animals making grade "choice" or "prime." Farmers for the most part said little openly. There was a lot of grumbling going on, which could be taken as dissatisfaction. And yet there was also a lot of misunderstanding as quite a few admitted they don't really understand what was explained.

Marshall suspects that the new regulations are something "this industry cannot live with." According to him, the meat business may very well "turn full circle" to what he had 30 or 40 years ago when three or four large companies dominated the scene. The small companies, in his opinion, will not fare well under the proposals. "This can't be done to help anybody — consumer, feeder, butcher, buyer, packer," he exclaimed.

Besides the lower rate of grain feeding, a cattleman's feed program is not expected to change. At least not at first. McCoy made the observation that the new regulations first surfaced when corn prices were so high. But now, with lowered prices, they're out of place and he thinks that feeders in this area, who generally go for high quality finishes, will not fare as well because of it.

"I don't think we should legislate this kind of thing," he remarked, "but it appears imminent and the question is 'where do we go from here as an industry?'"



WHEN CHAMPIONS MEET



The HYBRIDS of Tomorrow - Today



FRED GUTWEIN & SON

WITH

40 YRS. OF CORN PRODUCTION 5 YRS. OF PLOT PERFORMANCE
IN THE EAST . . . 1 YR. OF SALES IN THE EAST.

— JOIN A GROWING COMPANY —

HAROLD J. DIETRICH

RD1 Box 98
Richland, PA 17087

NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOC.

★ **WINNER — 25 ACRE CONTEST** ★

WALTER HASSELBRING

WATSEKA, ILLINOIS

• YIELD OF 288.82 BUSHELS • GUTWEIN 64

PENNSYLVANIA 5 ACRE CONTEST

★ **2ND — EAR CORN CLASS** ★

GEORGE STAMBAUGH

NEWVILLE, PA

• YIELD OF 174.3 BUSHELS • GUTWEIN 65A