

South American agriculture

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Argentina

The vast Pampas region of Argentina has the potential to produce several times its present volume of farm produce. We spent several days around the city of Venadotuerto, right in the heart of the Pampas region. One of our visits was to the 3000 hectare (7400 acre) Estancia (ranch) called "Las Molles." Imagine a perfectly flat farm with topsoil three to four feet deep, that is three miles wide and 3½ miles long! The farm employs 23 workers, many of whom are the very colorful "Gauchos" with their broad sombreros, baggy pantalons, high boots, and silver-spangled belt which holds a long knife and a bolero, which is a short rope with a ball on each end used to snare runaway calves. This ranch featured a beef

breeding herd of about 2000 head of cows plus another 2000 feeder cattle of all ages. Argentine beef is not grass fed as we have supposed, but may be said to be range fed, which means they are grown and fattened on a variety of green crops including native grasses, alfalfa, sorghums, weeping lovegrass, and even corn which is pastured in the pre-dough stage. The beef we had in Argentina was some of the best I've ever eaten. They like to serve steak twice a day - in fact, steak is considered a "convenience" meal just like we might serve hamburger.

Cash crops grown in the Pampas region include corn, soybeans, sunflowers and grain sorghum. There was a widespread drought over the entire Pampas this summer, (October to April in the Southern Hemisphere) resulting in only 60 percent of a normal corn crop.

The cash grain farmers have no price incentive to encourage them to use fertilizer or lime. The average pH is 5.5, so they could benefit by using lime but they claim that there is no economic advantage to use lime, phosphorus or potash on field crops. The only element used in quantity is nitrogen.

There is a lot of grumbling and discontent among farmers and farm leaders concerning the Peronist government. Leadership is ineffective and extremely corrupt and agriculturists in Argentina claim openly that any kind of government would be better than the one they have - even a benevolent dictator if need be. Agriculture is Argentina's major industry but has not been recognized by the Peronist regime. My observation is that, given favorable incentives to make

an honest Peso, Argentine agriculture could give United States farmers some competition worth worrying about.

We think we have inflation here in the USA. Well, Argentina has it to an extent we haven't dreamed of yet. During the few days we spent in Argentina, the value of the Peso varied from 240 to 270 for one United States dollar. We could buy many Argentine products such as leather goods (handbags, shoes) for one-third to one-fifth their cost here.

Argentines were very friendly to us and were anxious to have us understand their predicament. Argentina is a potentially very rich nation but will never realize their economic goals until they achieve a strong, stable government.

The state of Santa Fe has its own A.I. Bull Stud at Venado tuerto. They own sons of some of the most popular Holstein Sires in Canada and the United States. They are also using Brahma and Zebu sires for their resistance to the heat and insects. They import semen only as needed to produce the special matings for their own breeding stock.

Telephone service in the Pampas region is very bad and radio is unreliable at certain times. So carrier pigeons are used to send a message to the Bull Center when a cow is to be bred. Each farmer uses a coded leg band for identification and pigeons return to the Bull Center within two hours after release. They claim that it is the most reliable

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, March 13, 1976—59

method of communication they have found to get the job done. The keeper of the pigeons at the A.I. Bull Center told us that the only problem they have is that occasionally a hawk will capture a pigeon and the message is lost.

Brazil

Brazil is a continent in itself, stretching over 3000 miles from north to south, and nearly as far from east to west. The population is largely centered around the great cities along the coast. Porto Alegre in the south is a vast, sprawling coastal city in the heart of picturesque, rolling and unbelievably steep hillside farms. We visited the grape growing area north of the city and toured a winery at Caxias Do Sul. The area was colonized nearly 200 years ago by Italians and Germans, who brought their skills along from Europe. They maintain many of their old traditional ways of life and were very proud to share their folklore - and their wines - with the visiting North Americans.

Our host for one day was Hans Weissheimer, a dairy farmer of German descent, who lives about 60 km (37 miles) north of Porto Alegre. He is up-grading a herd of Holsteins with bull semen imported from the USA. We saw some beautiful daughters of Astronaut, Ivanhoe Star and Gay Ideal. Hans has visited the United States and purchased cattle from several central Pennsylvania Holstein Breeders. One unfortunate Penn-

sylvanian heifer failed to breed, so it was slaughtered and barbecued for our dinner!

When we arrived in Rio de Janeiro our group was delighted to learn that Henry Kissinger had also just arrived and was staying at the Rio-Sheraton Hotel where we were also staying. Most of us saw him enter or leave the hotel lobby and some even shook hands with him. He took note of our People-To-People badge - hope he realized that we were also on a good will mission to South America.

There is very little agriculture around Rio - just spectacular mountains of solid granite jutting out of the rain-forest jungle. The city itself is a modern, sparkling jewel mounted in a setting of silvery lagoons and coastal inlets gouged out of granite by the sea. The jewel, however, is flawed by numerous shantytowns on the hills above the city. Thousands of people keep moving into the city from the hinterlands with no job, no money and no talent so they squat on the hills and live in filthy tin huts. Every great city has problems and this is Rio's greatest.

Our last stop in South America was the great, new city of Brasilia. Only 15 years old it was completely planned and built as the Capital of Brazil. It is a completely utilitarian metropolis with wide boulevards, many parks and functional but beautiful buildings, many of which were designed by architect Oscar Neimeyer. To encourage agricultura

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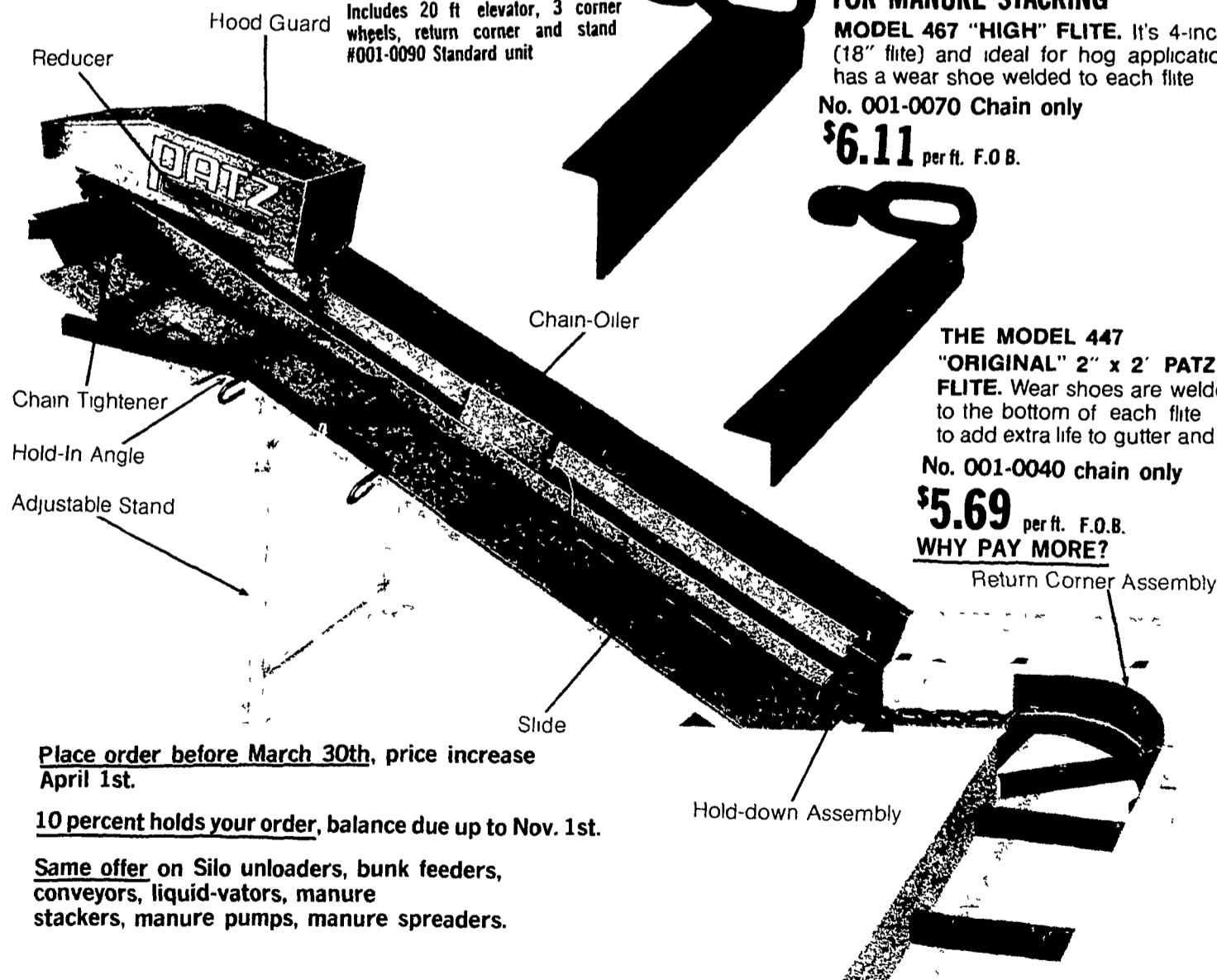
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