

FTC co-op investigations to continue

By DIETER KRIEG
WASHINGTON, D.C. — Food is a sensitive issue, and when prices of groceries began to rise rather rapidly

in 1973-74, people became suspicious. The general population went on a search for a "villain." Consequently, politicians,

government agencies, and the Justice Department have been aroused to prompt investigations.

One of the first agricultural concerns to be looked at were farmer cooperatives, and that investigation continues to go on. Cooperatives have become a scapegoat.

Ken Naden, from the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, which has its headquarters here in the capital, presented some of his views to newspaper farm editors recently. The occasion was the annual meeting of the Newspaper Farm Editors of America.

Asked if labor unions aren't operating under similar legal guarantees and rights as farm cooperatives, Naden said there is no difference. Except one — "an enormous difference in political power."

Naden spoke out in behalf of cooperatives, claiming that the Justice Department and some consumer groups

were "out to get" the co-ops. The suggestion was made by one reporter if the elimination of cooperatives might not lead the way towards the elimination of individual enterprises after that. Naden did not rule that possibility out and suggested that the farmers' story be told more frequently. "Communication is what farmers — cooperatives — need most," he reminded. Farmer cooperatives are not instrumental in enhancing any unfair prices, Naden said, and there is no need to repeal the Capper-Volstead Act which gave birth to farmer cooperatives more than 50 years ago. "But the Justice Department would find any enhancement of price as unjustified," Naden declared.

The cooperative leader said farm co-ops were formed to insure farmers greater equity in the market place, as an instrument for group action, and for a "fair degree of bargaining power between buyer and seller." Furthermore, cooperatives are a "democratic system of management — run by farmers," Naden said.

Cooperatives are also instrumental in strengthening the family farm and encouraging high output through free enterprise, the co-op leader said. "Cooperatives maintain the integrity and usefulness of the family farm and individual en-

terprise competition," Naden told the group.

Also present on the program with Naden were Judd Mason, from the economic division of the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) and Alfred Dougherty from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC is one of the agencies looking into the cooperative system of doing business. NMPF is an organization made up of numerous dairy cooperatives across the country.

"The real story of milk must be told," Mason told the farm reporters. "The hard work and so forth — it's not getting many headlines."

Mason went on to note that the symposium which was sponsored by NMPF last month in Washington was well attended by the media. Government agencies, consumer groups and critics. "They were all invited, and all were there," he proclaimed proudly.

He asked the reporters: "Would organized labor drop wages which were over the minimum wage set by law?" He does not think it necessary for farmers to have to accept the "minimum" price suggested by lawmakers and defends the right of cooperatives to negotiate for over-order pricing.

Mason said he was "fairly sure the Capper-Volstead Act will remain untouched —

I don't think Congress will dismantle something it has built after all these years." Referring to the Symposium again, Mason said his organization had not received any feedback to date, but "I think, if anything, maybe they'll have some second thoughts" before more inaccurate and derogatory information is published. He was referring in particular to a series of stories written by nationally syndicated columnist Sylvia Porter.


Dougherty, from the FTC, claimed he was not aware of Miss Porter's published reports on the dairy industry, and milk cooperatives in particular. He also claimed his Department has neither the resources nor the data to undertake a complete study of the milk marketing system. That was challenged by at least one reporter since milk marketing orders have large volumes filled with marketing statistics.

"The fact is we know very little about the economics of the marketing order system . . . and we don't know what would happen if we didn't have milk marketing orders," the FTC representative announced. "We should have a cost-benefit study," he suggested, hinting that it was a subject the media could look into as well.

The FTC has recommended that cooperatives be investigated further.

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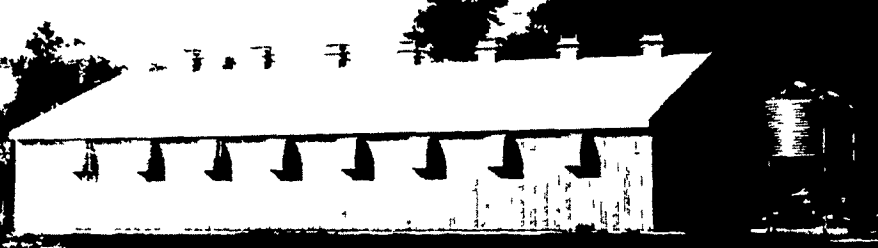


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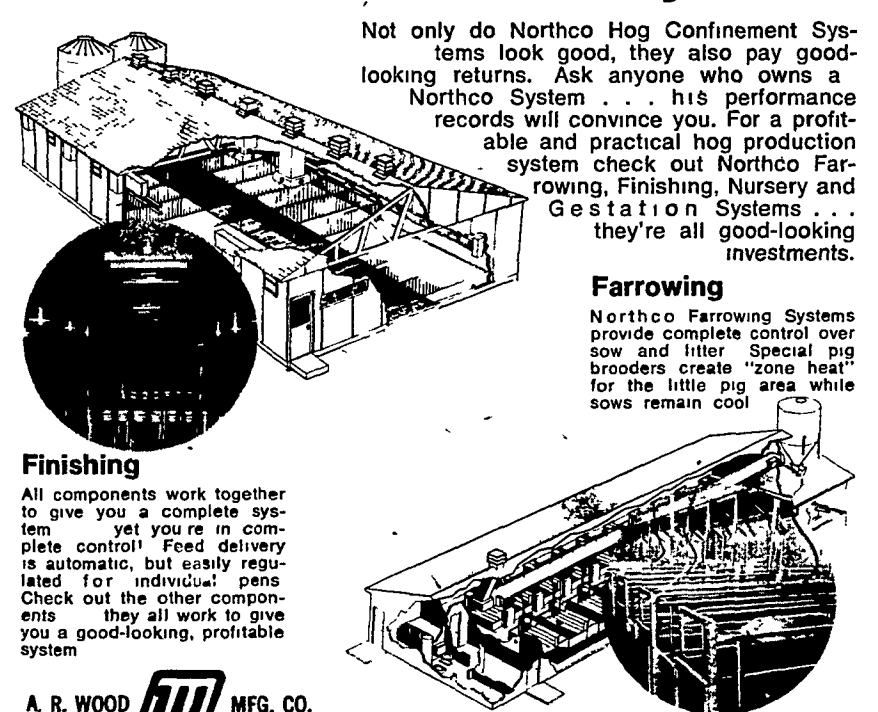
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