

Survey shows

# Consumers now ready to work with farmers

WASHINGTON, D.C. - An overwhelming number of consumers see joint action with farmers as a major step in improving the nation's food system, according to a nationwide survey of 2500 consumers.

Results of the survey sponsored by the Agriculture Council of America were announced here recently by Dale Hendricks, an Iowa dairyman and ACA Chairman.

"Consumers all over the country are very concerned about the price, quality and nutritional value of food that reaches the supermarket," Hendricks said.

"They are looking for solutions and are anxious to work with the food producer to do something about the situation. I am particularly encouraged by the fact that 81 per cent say they feel the interests of farmers and consumers are similar enough to warrant joint action."

Hendricks also explained that the questionnaire is being used as a tool in a comprehensive effort to identify ways farmers and consumers can work together. "The results of this project, have set the stage for concrete action," he said.

According to the questionnaire, which was distributed by teams of farm couples who traveled to major metropolitan centers in the U.S., a majority of consumers are seeking changes in the food system. Many of the consumers seemed to be calling for a "no frills supermarket" as an alternative to the supermarket.

An overwhelming majority favor less convenience preparation and packaging and want more bulk purchasing. Similarly, more than 70 per cent want less service and more price competition in food processing and retailing. Less government regulation

in food production and processing was cited by 42 per cent as a way to cut food costs, although written comments indicated wide support for health and safety standards.

A large majority of consumers are apparently dissatisfied with food prices, and 90 per cent see more direct farm to consumer marketing as a possibility for cutting costs. But in addition to food costs, the quality and nutritional value of food is a big concern. Less than half said they were satisfied with the quality and nutritional value of food, and written comments on the questionnaire served to emphasize their concern. One man wrote, "We'd probably fare better eating the package and throwing the food away."

Dissatisfaction to a large degree seemed to be directed to what consumers apparently feel are over-processed and highly-

advertised "empty foods." Although a slim majority opposed reducing the variety and number of food items carried by supermarkets, written comments indicated that many want more upprocessed foods. A Berkeley respondent said, "There's too much plastic food and preservatives. I'm concerned with the lack of variety of fresh foods."

Opinions about trade were also asked for on the questionnaire. A slim majority of consumers favored food exports, and an almost equal number said farm export decisions should be made by farmers.

"There seems to be a great deal of confusion on some aspects of the trade issue," Hendricks said. "For example, cross tabulation of the data shows that among those people who oppose farm exports, a large majority say farmers should make farm export decisions."

Consumers are about evenly split on the question of restriction the importation of food products that are cheaper because they are "subsidized by foreign governments, with 43 per cent in favor of restriction and 40 per cent opposing it.

A cross-tabulation of questions relating to trade indicated that opinions are split on ideological grounds of either "free trade" or, as one man said, "America first - the heck with foreigners."

Among those who opposed exports, the sentiment, as judged from written comments, tended to be anti-foreigner, anti-communist or nationalistic. One man wrote, "Let them eat oil," while another commented "Let the Russians eat Communism."

distributed were completed and returned. This 12.5 per cent response is particularly high, as most questionnaires have a one to three per cent response rate average.

The fact-finding tour and distribution of the questionnaires were preceded by a National Conference last November, at which time 40 prominent farm and consumer leaders began identifying potential areas of agreement. One outgrowth of the attempt so far has been the formation of a "Farmer - Consumer Roundtable" that will seek solutions to problems confronting farmers and consumers on a continuing basis. The Roundtable members, including farm and national consumer organization representatives, have already begun planning a major national conference for April 6 and 7 in Washington, D.C.

Several topics that offer promise for joint action have already been identified, and they will be further explored at the April conference. The conference is expected to identify, more specifically, areas of cooperation and to provide the understanding and impetus necessary for farmers and consumers to work together on a regular basis.

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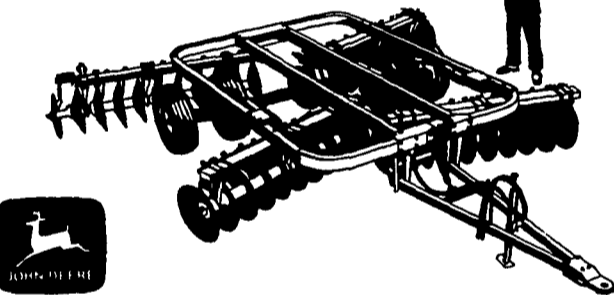


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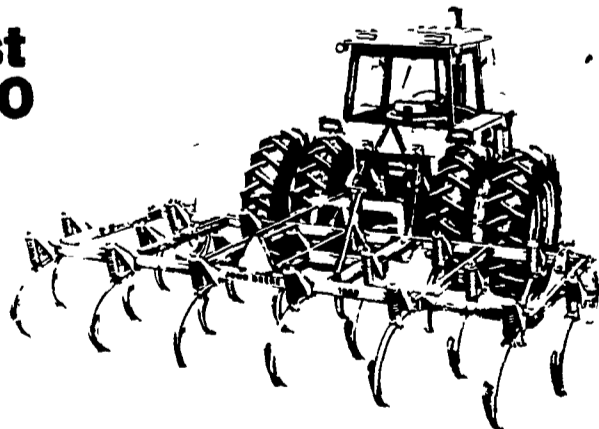


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