



Meeting at the Hotel Washington, across from the White House, and at the nearby National Press Club, the Newspaper Farm Editors of America were

briefed by numerous USDA officials during their four-day conferences.

Ag chiefs brief

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Later in the day the editors met with Agriculture Secretary Robert Bergland and asked him if he felt the price of hamburger would rise to \$2 per pound within two years. He declined to confirm the statement, chuckling that he "had no

idea" the price would be one, two, or three dollars per pound. The Secretary was then asked if one dollar for a loaf of bread was a likelihood in the near future. Bergland guaranteed that it would not happen, citing studies that the price of wheat would have to rise to \$4.90 per

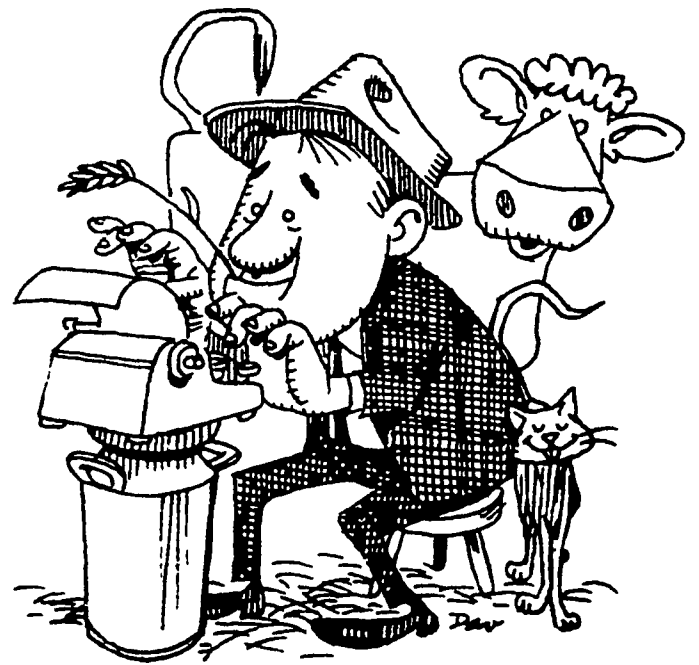
bushel in order for bread to be priced at \$1 per loaf.

Both Meyer and Bergland spoke briefly on energy and the cost of food, as did several other speakers during the NFEA meetings.

Meyer noted that 40 per cent of the cost of food is in packaging, and a whopping 60 per cent is in the combined costs for packaging and transportation. "If the housewife goes back to

cooking, instead of just opening packages and cans, she'd cut her food bills," the California farmer turned ag secretary exclaimed.

Bergland told the editors that a total of 17 per cent of America's energy use is burned up by the food industry. Although President Carter's new energy policies are expected to have some effect on agriculture, farmers are not expected to be



The typical farm editor

hit as directly as others. Agriculture will continue to receive top priority treatment. Nothing has yet been decided as to whether or not restrictions will be placed on tractors, similar to those being talked about for gas-guzzling cars.

In the event of shortages, such as were experienced this past Winter, Bergland does not envision a change in priorities for fuel allocations. Milk processing plants, for example, will continue to be high on the list, Bergland assured a representative of Inter-State Milk Producers Cooperative.

In terms of producing food energy, Bergland said that the United States is the least efficient, using up 15 calories of energy to produce one calorie on the dinner plate. It's possible that some studies will be initiated to investigate agricultural use of energy, but nothing definite has been decided yet.

Another area of concern for Bergland is the taking away of more and more agricultural land. "In my lifetime," the Secretary said, "we've paved over the equivalent of Ohio." Pausing a moment, he added "before this century is out, we'll have paved over the equivalent of Indiana."

"We can't keep on doing that," Bergland exclaimed.

Turning his attention to the new farm bill being discussed on Capitol Hill, Bergland said that a "too costly" bill would stand a good chance of being vetoed

by President Carter. "Too costly" is figured to be something in excess of \$2 billion, although Carter may not necessarily be veto-inclined if a bill for \$2.1 billion is submitted.

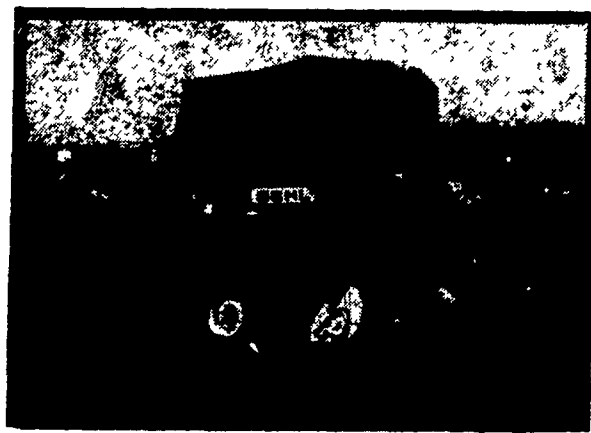
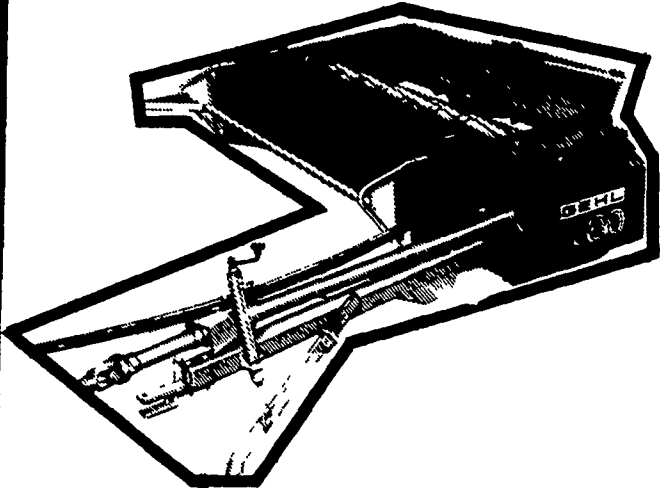
Bergland acknowledged that the cattle industry is in trouble, and has been for some years—due to the large number of cattle on hand. "There is no quick fix or magic cure for the cattle industry," he lectured.

Two-thirds of the USDA budget is spent for "public feeding," the newspaper farm editors were told. Included in "public feeding" are food stamps and school lunch programs.

Another big expense for the Department is the operation of 17,000 field offices. While USDA is currently looking into the feasibility of joining or consolidating offices, "we could get into bureaucratic hodgepodge in some cases," the USDA Secretary said. Bergland further noted that budgeting problems within his Department bother him "a whole lot" and that he has plans for streamlining USDA in Washington before attempting to do the same in the field.

On a final note, Bergland said there would be no embargo on soybeans under any circumstances short of war. "Foreign nations are asking constantly about supplies," he said. "I'm confident that price rationing will work. The market place will be the determining factor."

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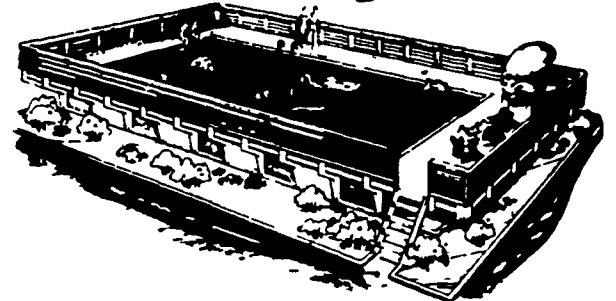
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