

Housewife wants fewer frills, and more food per dollar

By JERRY WEBB
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Consumers may not be very happy about food prices, but at least they're not blaming farmers. That's the consensus of a survey just released by the Agricultural Council of America. The Council distributed questionnaires nationwide in 1976 to farmers and consumers as part of a national tour. Responses indicate a growing unhappiness with the food marketing system but not with the farmer.

Five out of seven consumers who answered the questionnaire said they were dissatisfied with prices they pay in the supermarkets. Six out of seven said they want more price competition in supermarkets and they also said they're not happy with the frills, packaging and conveniences added to so many supermarket items.

Milking contest for goats set

GLOUCESTER, N.J. -- The Garden State Dairy Goat Association of New Jersey has set June 5 for its DHIA milking competition to be held at the Gloucester County 4-H fair grounds.

This is an opportunity for small herd or single goat owners to earn a star milker certification for their animals. The milking competition is open to all goat owners.

Animals must be at the fair grounds prior to the 7

p.m. pre-test milkout on June 4. For information and fees, please contact Anna M. Hartman, R1, Box 486 G, Stockton, N.J. 08559. Phone 609-397-0579.

The Garden State Dairy Goat Association meets monthly with programs designed to help the new goat owner as well as the more experienced. The next club meeting is May 15, 2 p.m. at the Somerset County 4-H building on Milltown Road, Bridgewater, N.J. All are welcome to attend.

Most consumers prefer to blame the middleman and inflation in general rather than the farmer for rising food prices. They appealed for less variety, less packaging and preservatives, and better prices. In an effort to deal with a shrinking food budget, consumers said they are turning away from the high-priced, fancy-packaged convenience items in favor of the basics.

Responding to the survey, they said they want more direct buying. To them that meant going directly to the farmer for fresh, unadulterated foods with less service for less money.

Perhaps consumers haven't demonstrate this in their supermarket buying habits, but at least they're saying it when asked. They want less frills and more food for the dollar. As one consumer put it, "We don't need 50 kinds of cereal."

Supermarket management over the years has proven to be very sensitive to the buying habits of food shoppers. If there are 50 kinds of cereal on the shelf, it's because consumers have been willing to buy that many different kinds. In many instances, they have insisted on a wide variety. So it's really not fair to yell at the store manager because he stocks four or five thousand different grocery items. Experience and his sales volume have told him what consumers really want in spite of this most recent survey.

So if consumers do in fact want less frills, they're going to have to demonstrate it in their shopping carts. If they buy fewer convenience foods, more bulk items and simpler packaging, store management will quickly get the message.

The Agricultural Council also talked to the consumers about farm exports, only a slim majority of consumers agreed with them. The survey found farmers in the awkward position of strongly favoring exports but being against the "subsidized imports" as they exist today. On the other hand, consumers who favored farm exports also favored farm imports.

That's a tough question to deal with in a survey, since it's so complicated and since it's hard to get at the real issue of subsidy. Many agricultural interests would argue that a lot of imported food items are subsidized while exported food items are in many instances penalized. They feel that's unfair. Others want a free market, what ever that is, and still others want to export farm goods but almost totally restrict any incoming farm produce.

The U.S. finds itself in an enviable position of being a multibillion dollar food exporter. We provide a large volume of basic food items for a growing world population. On the other hand, we tend to import those specialty items, including coffee, that just won't grow here.

Consumers find it difficult to see U.S. food sent to foreign nations at what they feel are bargain prices while their supermarket bills continue to go up. Perhaps they forget the foreign goods they buy and what this does to our balance of trade. We must sell something abroad if we're going to buy so much, and food seems to be about all we have for sale that foreign countries want.

Also, it must be remembered that we produce so much more of the basic food items such as soybeans and wheat than we can possibly use, so exporting is not a question, it's a requirement.

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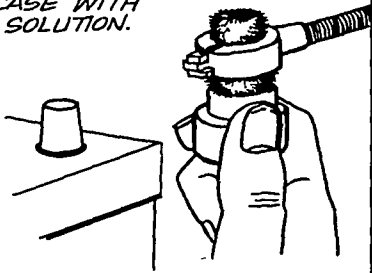
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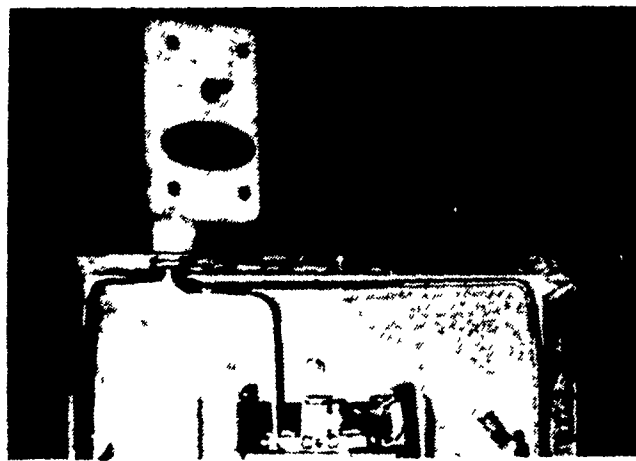


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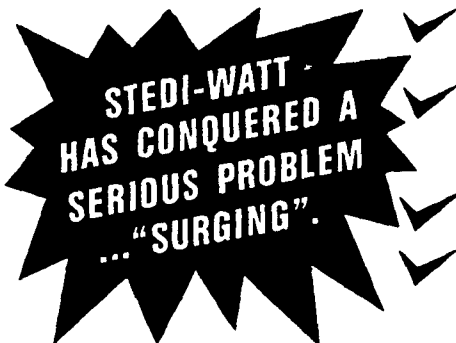
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