

EDITORIAL COMMENTS By DIETER KRIEG, EDITOR



Don't take your market for granted

Just as the farmers' strike was beginning to pick up some steam in late December of last year, one Midwestern observer commented that the average farmer knows as much about marketing as an average sow knows about opera. The bottom line was that to some degree farmers were responsible for their own predicament. They didn't really understand the market. They overproduced, and a great oversupply of a commodity spells disaster in prices.

Admittedly, there is a lot more to the marketing picture, particularly with grain, where the government and large exporting firms have a big say in the economics of marketing. A few large grain exporting contracts could easily make the difference between profits and losses.

Not too many farmers in this part of the country can truly identify with the plight of Midwestern grain producers. But there's a lesson here for all farmers. How much does the farmer really know about marketing?

For months now, dairy farmers, for example, have heard and read stories of surplus production. Some comments have even come in the form of warnings. It is said that dairying has a dim year or two coming its way in the near future if production isn't tailored to meet demands. For some, in fact, that nightmare has already arrived. Handfuls of shippers are being shut off around the country as many of the smaller dairies face the pressures of surplus supplies and tightening economics. Some of them will be closing their doors in the months to come, maybe even sooner than that.

These are sad situations. But they're happening. Even the large dairy cooperatives, which guarantee their members a milk market, are buckling slightly under the pressures of surplus supplies and the resulting higher marketing costs.

The last couple of months have seen dairy cooperatives impose special deductions on members' milk checks to help cover the extra costs of marketing. Special reserve funds are also being tapped. There's no doubt about it, profits are being sacrificed because of overproduction. Fortunately for the dairyman, he has a guaranteed price support from the government and if he's a co-op member, he has further protection there. The grain farmer wasn't as lucky.

The question remains -- how much does the farmer really know about marketing? Everybody tries to get in on the action when the price is good, and it triggers an oversupply, which in turn triggers low prices. It's an old, old story.

Farmers can afford themselves a little security in this regard, however. The answer is a willingness to spend a few dollars for the protection of a market. A strong and steady market. That is one of the things cooperatives do.

Sure it costs to join a cooperative. There's a deduction on every hundred pounds of milk, for example. That may be money the dairyman would like to have in his pocket. Too often some dairymen think of it as money down the drain. He had better start thinking of it as an investment or insurance policy. It can pay him big dividends.

Consider, please, the hundreds of thousands -- even millions -- of dollars, you, the farmer, have invested in your operation. Chances are the producer is willing to spend \$20,000 for a tractor, \$2000 for seed corn, \$40,000 for a combine, \$1500 for a cow, and so on. All are generally regarded as necessary expenses. But when it comes to the costs of securing a market, the purse strings tighten. Yet, without a secure market, all of the previous investments are useless. Essentially, they could be the ones that went down the drain, instead of the membership dues for the cooperative.

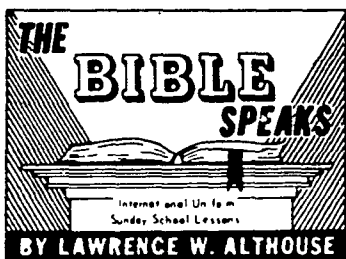
Cooperatives have a useful and commendable place in agriculture. Faithful members understand that Dairy farmer members are taking their extra deductions now because of the surplus situations. But let's not forget that several years ago the reverse was true. Premiums were paid to members to supplement the comparatively low milk prices at that time. This example points out what can and does happen when farmers invest a little of their income in cooperative efforts.

And, lest anyone get the wrong impression, cooperatives don't own the farmer who chooses to become a member. Instead, the farmer is part owner of the cooperative. The farmer is free to join, and free to leave at anniversary dates of his contract. There's nothing further involved. No commitments to withhold farm products, shoot calves, or go on strike if something doesn't suit. There's no collective call for 100 per cent of parity either. The cooperative

way of doing business has nothing in common with unionism, strikes, and the like.

The need for market security can further be exemplified by pointing out the importance creditors place on it. It's becoming more fashionable now for the banker to ask about your market when you go to the bank. There was a time when that aspect of farming didn't seem to matter much. It was taken for granted. But today it's vital. Not all marketing outlets of 1978 will be around in 1979. The banker knows it. So should the farmer. And he should think about investing a little towards market security. Furthermore, he should think twice before joining groups which offer market security under conditions which might not fit the marketing philosophy of the individual. That could lead to bitter emotional and moral conflicts, for example, if an organization calls for a "dump your milk" order and the farmer doesn't agree with that stand. There, again, the abstaining farmer is out of the marketing picture. Cooperatives don't get involved with such tactics.

While this editorial is not intended to endorse any particular cooperative, it is hoped that farmers will give some thought to their marketing options. It's a case of a little money spent in order to make all the other investments pay off a little better. Such consideration will not eliminate profits or losses, but it may very well save the food and fibre producer from one day being notified that he no longer has a place to sell his product.



THE SHEPHERD IS YOU!
Lesson for February 26, 1978

Background Scripture:
Psalms 23; 91

Devotional Reading:
Psalms 91; 1-10

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."

So begins the best-known of all the psalms, perhaps even the best-known single chapter in the Bible or any scriptures. We all know what comfort and assurance these words can release within us. We have read them, heard them, sung them and seen them depicted in great works of art, but they never seem to lose their power.

It is customary to receive these familiar words as a personal message of assurance and hope. After all, it was with that in mind that they were first written.

Today, however, just for this once, at least, I'd like for you to consider the 23rd Psalm from a different perspective.

He restores me

The image of God as the Good Shepherd is very significant for us. Jesus himself picked this up and in the Gospel According to John we find him saying: "I am the good shepherd." As God meets our needs and protects his people, so Jesus also follows in that same role.

But although you and I are the "sheep" of whom both the psalmist and Jesus are speaking, our Lord makes it

clear that there are times when we are to give up the role of being his "sheep" and become shepherds like him.

In John 21 Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Feed my lambs" and "Tend my sheep." In his farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul proclaims: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord..." (Acts 20:28). And in 1 Peter 5:2 we hear this exhortation: "Tend the flock of God that is your charge... And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you

will obtain the unfading crown of glory."

The dark valley

Some will find it disturbing to think of Psalm 23 as a challenge as well as a comfort, but Jesus made it clear that discipleship is servanthood, even as he came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. So, as the psalmist declares how God has restored his strength and hope, so he also calls us to a ministry of restoring others. As he speaks of the protection God gives him in the dark valleys, so the Chief Shepherd calls us to use our

resources to protect others. As we are reminded of the overflowing blessings given new to us each day by a loving Shepherd, so we are challenged to share what we have received to abundantly bless the lives of others. And it is not enough for me to declare that "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," unless I am willing also to become a channel of goodness and mercy for those around me.

Yes, the Chief Shepherd is always there to help, comfort, and sustain us, but let us remember that he sometimes intends the shepherd to be you.

NOW IS THE TIME

By Max Smith, Lancaster County Agricultural Agent

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TO CREEP-FEED LAMBS
Sheep producers who plan to market some of their early lambs during the Easter season, should be feeding them extra grain, this can be done by providing a place where the lambs can enter but not the ewes. In this area a grain mixture of corn and oats can be kept at all times. This will result in

heavier lambs for the high-priced Easter market. Many breeders use the creep-feeders to bring their breeding replacements along faster, this is especially true if the lambs are to be showed or sold. Extra good care of the young lambs, including worm control, should pay dividends. Market lambs

prices have been very favorable early in the Spring.

TO PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE FLOODING

As we all realize, there is a very heavy snow cover on the ground in most parts of Pennsylvania and the northeast. Our weather has been very cold since the

heavy snows and there has been very little melting. If heavy rains, or very warm weather, should come in the next week or so, we could have some serious flooding conditions. Folks in the flood zones should be on the alert for flooding forecasts and be prepared to protect their livestock and property. A special leaflet on preparing

for floods is available at our Penn State Extension Offices. I'd suggest that we get prepared for the worst, even though flood conditions may not occur.

TO PROTECT FISH IN FARM PONDS

Snow and ice covered ponds for any length of time can cause "winter kill" of the fish. This happens when dissolved oxygen is depleted in the pond, when oxygen supplies fall below a certain level, the fish will suffocate. Winter kill is not likely to happen in ponds that do not freeze completely, or that have a constant flow of water going through the pond. Pond owners whose

ponds have literally been sealed for the past two weeks, might clear some snow from the ice and chop holes in the ice and insert brush, logs, or wooden rails; this will permit sunlight and air to get to the water. If fish come to the surface and gasp, they need more oxygen. Ponds with water depths of 10 feet or more will have less trouble than ponds that are only four to six feet deep.

Farm Calendar

Saturday, Feb. 25
Adams County all-day fruitgrowers meeting, 9 a.m. in the cafeteria of the Musselman Division, Pet, Inc. Biglerville.
Pennsylvania Flying Far-

mers' Convention History, Strasburg Restaurant, Strasburg.
New Jersey Flower and Garden Show, 9 a.m. runs through March 5 at

the National Guard Armory in Morristown.
Sunday, Feb. 26
National Egg Council 37th annual convention and trade show, Hilton Palace, Orlando, Fla. and

Antonio Convention Center, San Antonio, Texas.
Pennsylvania Flying Farmers' Convention, Historic Strasburg Restaurant, Strasburg.
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