

Farmers' decisions tough this year

By JERRY WEB
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NEWARK, Del. — Farming is off to a slow start this year and already it's having an impact in the marketplace. A combination of low temperatures and more than adequate moisture supplies have slowed farmers in getting back into the fields clear across the country. Add to that the possibility that some farmers may hold land out of production and the fact that the government is still messing around with farm programs at a time when

farmers should have their plans all made. It all adds up to a rather confusing marketing picture for the next several months. Mid-west economists are talking about uncertainty and confusion in the marketplace as they point to increased prices over the past several weeks for corn and soybeans. The market for corn and beans seems to be very sensitive to almost anything that's happening. Although it's too early to plant most field crops, the market is already sensitive to the fact

that farmers might have trouble planting those crops. On the other hand, it might dry up and they might get their crops planted in a big hurry, and what's happening now would be mere speculation. So what's a farmer to do? If he's still worrying about whether to plant corn or soybeans, he has a tough decision to make right now. And even the best decision could go wrong between now and market time because if too many farmers decide higher prices for soybeans make them more attractive, then they may in fact kill the market.

The economic experts see the soybean situation a little differently than corn. They talk about the old crop and the amount of usage and the size of the Brazilian crop. Some experts are saying that country's output will be below 10 million metric tons, and that's a short enough crop to add considerable strength to U.S. soybean prices.

But unlike so many other industries, agriculture is at the mercy of the weather. Here we are at a time when seeds don't really need to be planted and prices for next fall's crops are being influenced. So many weather variables could hit a farmer between now and harvesttime that it seems silly to even try to guess at a proper selling price. Our current wet weather could turn into a long dry spell, or those critical rains in July could go somewhere else. Or how about an early frost, or another wet Fall? And maybe we get all those things here in the mid-Atlantic region and they

have beautiful weather in the Corn Belt. It's tough for a farmer to come up with a strategy that will look good next Fall. I hear farmers talking about contracting when beans reach a certain figure or when corn reaches a certain figure. They talk about contracting a few thousand bushels but not the entire crop. Meantime, they wait to get into the fields and wonder what else the government is going to do.

No one is totally discounting the American Agriculture movement for that matter. A lot of farmers are going along with that program, cutting back rather drastically on their production. A report out of Kansas the other day indicated that thousands of acres of Kansas wheat are being plowed under as part of the farm strike. Not many people are expecting enough idle production to drastically affect prices, but every little bit counts. Farm commodities are so sensitive to a little bit of overproduction or a small shortage that even the slightest expectation can send the market tumbling or spiraling.

By now most farmers' field crop plans are pretty firm. There is some flexibility depending on what happens with weather conditions, planting conditions, prices and some other factors during the next few weeks. But the shifts will be small and the government reports of planting intentions should be pretty well on target. It's a long time until harvest, however, and many things could go wrong between now and then.

Farmers play in one of the wildest crap games that has ever come along. They pile those high stakes on the

table and win or lose with a roll of the dice. The best farmer who does the best possible production job is still a big-time gambler, for production is only a small part of the farming game and so much of whether he wins or loses is totally out of his hands.

It's a strange business when what happens in Brazil is going to make a tremendous difference here in the U.S. Consider this prediction from the economists. They say for the

soybean crop, a short crop in Brazil is likely to result in a price peak this Spring here in the United States and then prices will decline from then on until harvest. How much they will decline will depend on the size of the soybean acreage and the developing prospects for final production. So a farmer who's really concerned about whether to plant soybeans or not, or how much to plant, needs to be watching the Brazilian soybean crop.

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The Finger Pickup installs just ahead of the paddle drum and delivers windrowed crop to the center line of the rotating paddles. Since it carries the windrow up and into the paddles they can be operated higher above the ground. This eliminates regrowth clipping or "stubble burn" and minimized paddle damage in rocky conditions. The increased height of the paddles dramatically reduces dust pickup, creating cleaner hay stacks. Also allows operator

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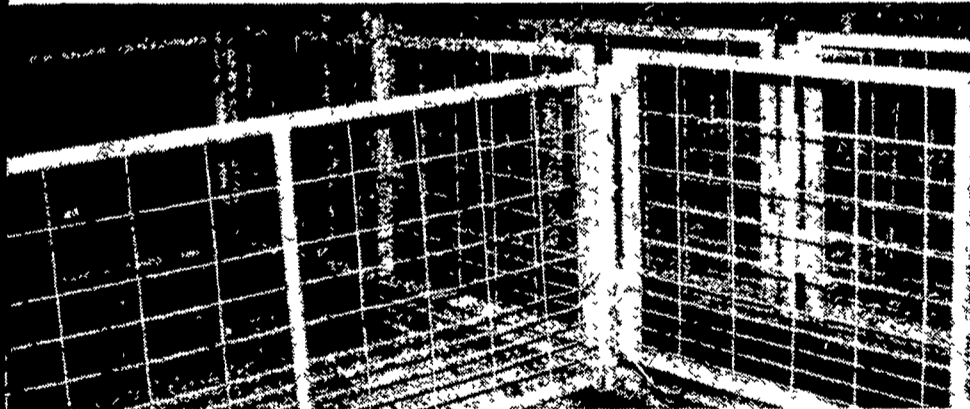
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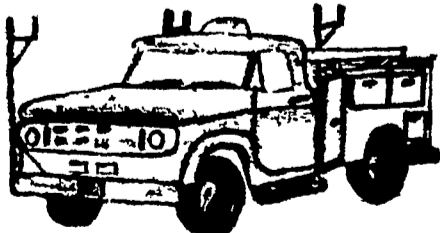
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