

# Car shortage sparks complaints and research

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The nation's railroads are "woefully incapable" of shipping fertilizer or agricultural foodstuffs to the marketplace, according to the president of The Fertilizer Institute, in remarks last week to a House subcommittee.

Edwin M. Wheeler encouraged favorable action on a bill, before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade, to temporarily remove duty on hopper cars manufactured and shipped into the U.S. by Mexico. Wheeler said that there are "simply not enough hopper cars, locomotives or serviceable tracks" in the U.S. to keep pace with demand.

The industry association president quoted a recent news release from the Association of American Railroads, which labeled its August backlog of cars (on order and undelivered) as the "highest figure since April 1975." The August backlog was listed as 75,573 cars compared to the April 1975 backlog of 78,860.

Wheeler predicted that fertilizer products, moving to farms for Fall application, will compete with agricultural commodities enroute to domestic and foreign markets. Coal and other nonfood items will also be shipped in massive quantities at the same time, he said.

"The simultaneous movement of these commodities will exacerbate the situation."

Calling on the legislators to recommend passage of the bill, Wheeler said that by allowing Mexican cars to enter duty-free, the U.S. can "hopefully ease the movement of its commerce to the marketplace and fertilizer to the farm for Fall application."

The bill, to suspend duties on Mexican railcars for two years, has been endorsed by the U.S. State Department and the Office of Management and Budget.

Meanwhile, scientists at the USDA research facilities at Beltsville say that a dual

purpose boxcar may be one solution to the shortage of hopper cars needed to haul grain.

The shortage is currently running about 46,000 cars per day, according to USDA. This figure represents the number of cars needed over and above those available to fill customers' orders. Although buying more cars would ease the shortage, railroads are reluctant to invest heavily in hopper cars because they can haul bulk cargo such as grain and soybeans one way, but they must make the return trip empty. Since the cars make only about 8 to 10 trips per year, the return on the carriers' investment in the cars is relatively low, says Philip Breakiron of USDA's Science and Education Administration.

A shortage of hopper cars means customers must wait for grain shipments—sometimes for several months—and farmers cannot move stored grain off the farm because elevators are already full. Storing grain over long periods of time reduces the quality of the grain and raises the storage costs. And, farmers cannot choose the best time to sell their grain.

Prototypes of the new dual-purpose boxcars, now being tested, have hauled grain one way and packaged freight such as boxed cereals the other. The prototypes have standard hopper bottoms and full-length roof-loading troughs so that grain can be loaded and unloaded in the conventional manner. They are also equipped with plug-type side doors and a

special high-strength steel grid-type, flow-through floor that allows grain to pass into the hoppers.

After grain is unloaded, the cars can be reloaded with packaged or palletized products stacked on the grated flooring. When not needed for hauling grain, these cars can be used year 'round like conventional boxcars.

A study of the new railcars is being conducted under a cooperative agreement between SEA's Transportation and Packaging Research Laboratory at Beltsville, Maryland, and the Milwaukee Railroad. Based on this study, a new, larger, lighter-weight prototype will be designed to further improve the efficiency and reduce the costs of hauling bulk and packaged cargo.

## Myers' farm for sale

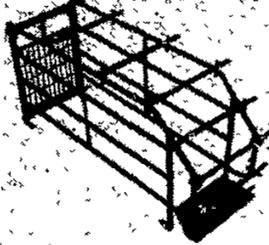
LANCASTER — The "Black and White Holstein Farm, through which thousands of head of dairy cattle were sold in the past 10 years, will be sold at auction on Oct. 12. The sale comes by order of Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Myers, owners. The Louis Traman Auction Co. will conduct the sale. Myers, who is known to most Holstein dairymen in Pennsylvania, will also be selling a second farm, known as Stony Battery Farm, Landisville. The Landisville farm will go on the block at 1 p.m.; the Black and White Holstein Farm, which is adjacent to Route 283, will be bid on beginning at 2:30 p.m.

## WHAT'S NEW

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The new "Better-Bill" gestation stall permits limited feeding of each sow with choice of either lift out or swinging gates, says the manufacturer. Constructed of full one inch steel pipe for long service, replaceable tab feet for fastening to floor, it is adjustable from 22 inches to 24 inches in width with overall dimensions of 40 inches high and 84 inches long.

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and installation, says the manufacturer. Complete information is available from The Pearson Bros. Co., Box Z, Galva, Ill. 61434.



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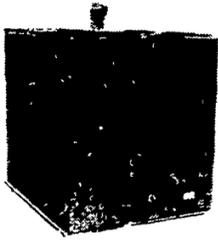
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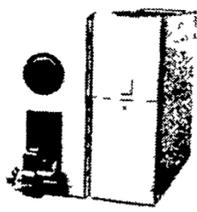
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