

# Dechant says

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Proclaiming that American cattlemen struggled through 36 straight months of production at a loss before their economic catastrophe was turned around last Spring, Dechant scorned the Carter Administration for having allowed beef imports into the country at that time. Their effect, despite the Administration's arguments to the contrary, was that beef prices tumbled. The message cattlemen received, says Dechant, is that it's not going to pay them to expand their cattle herds. Hence, the supply of meat will be scarce, and prices high. Dechant in no uncertain terms blames government strategists for the dilemma.

Touching on fuel supplies, Dechant said:

"A couple of years ago, when supplies were scarce, we were told that if prices went up, there'd be plenty of energy to go around. Well, back home I paid around 33 cents for a gallon of gasoline back then, now we're up over 70 cents a gallon, and how much more fuel have we got?" he inquired.

"Interest rates," Dechant continued, "are at their highest level in years; if they continue to climb like they are, they'll soon be at their highest point in 100 years. Inflation and unemployment are also increasing."

"What's it going to take to get America back to work?" is his underlying question.

As far as the farm economy is concerned, Dechant believes it can be improved with the simple stroke of a pen to increase commodity loan rates. A healthy farm economy, he argues, would lead to greater stability and productivity in other segments of business as well.

"The essence of free enterprise is consumption," the NFU chief went on. We produce and we consume. Our economic decisions have to relate to that, he said.

Considered to be one of the leading spokesmen for family agriculture, Dechant warns that dairy farmers in Pennsylvania and the rest of the country will face souring payments if support prices are allowed to dip below the 80 per cent level, as prescribed by law. Legislation to that effect comes to an end this Fall, and in view of that, Dechant urges dairymen to work towards continued price supports at 80 per cent or higher. The National Farmers Union, he added, favors dairy support prices at 90 per cent.

Another important legislative item is the Meat Import Act, which Dechant says will be reintroduced in Congress this year. Jimmy Carter vetoed the measure during the previous session of Congress.

While blaming the Carter Administration and meat imports for a portion of the ills in the agricultural economy, Dechant says even more can be done for cattlemen if the "Yellow Sheet" meat pricing formula "is brought out on the table where people can see it and understand it and those involved can be held accountable for it. Dechant charges that a few men determine meat prices across the country, but that their methods and reasons,

which are finalized on yellow paper, are not fully understood.

"I urge you to send letters to your congressmen, asking them to oppose "Yellow Sheet" pricing. That's one of the key places where we lose our shirts," he affirmed.

Nearing the conclusion of his remarks, Dechant took a direct stab at the heart of the nation's government. "We're the oldest democracy on Earth," he said in an emphatic tone, "and I think democracy is a god system, but we haven't been able to make it work in peacetime." Then he added: No other nation has been as richly blessed as the United States. Having been given so much, we have a responsibility of meeting the challenges of sufficient food production for ourselves and our neighbors.

Will America be able to meet the challenge?

Despite his negative observations, Dechant says he is confident the country will get off "dead center." He is encouraged by the amount of interest that is being shown for agriculture by religious, civic, and womens organizations. Also, consumers want to know more about farming and farm problems, Dechant says.

The farm leader cautions farmers, however, about becoming complacent with their increased spotlight. He encourages them to continue to work collectively for better farm prices and fair trade legislation. "We need an energy and food policy that makes sense for those who are intimately tied to the soil because it's the right thing to do," he concluded.



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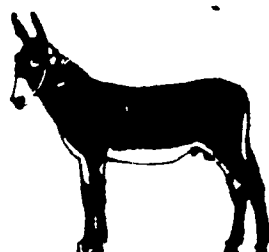
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