

Farmers will need increase

HARRISBURG - With farm operating costs currently running 11 per cent higher than a year ago, the inflation rate being predicted at somewhere between 7 and 10 per cent, and an OPEC oil price increase near 15 per cent, U.S. farmers will have to get 1979 price increases running from 12 to 15 per cent just to stand still income-wise, Reuben L. Johnson said at a luncheon session at the annual convention of the Pennsylvania Farmers Union on January 16.

Head of the Farmers Union's Washington legislative staff, Johnson told the convention, being held at the Penn Harris motel, that USDA economists are saying that "1979 may be a carbon copy of 1978 for the American farmer."

"While there was some improvement for some commodities in 1978, it was still a difficult year overall and it is hardly reassuring for farmers to hear that 1979 will be no better," Johnson said.

The Farmers Union official pointed out that dairymen have been somewhat better off than other commodities because they had a mandatory 80 per cent of parity support level, which escalated along with rising costs.

"However, the legislative authority for 80 per cent of parity supports expires this year and the support level could drop as low as 75 per cent of parity next October

1," Johnson explained. "We will work for a support level at 90 per cent of parity because we think it is fully justified by dairy farm operating costs."

Johnson said that Farmers Union and several other farm organizations would push for adoption of a proposed "National Agricultural Bargaining Act," which would require handlers of agricultural commodities to bargain in good faith with associations of farmers on prices of farm commodities and terms of sale.

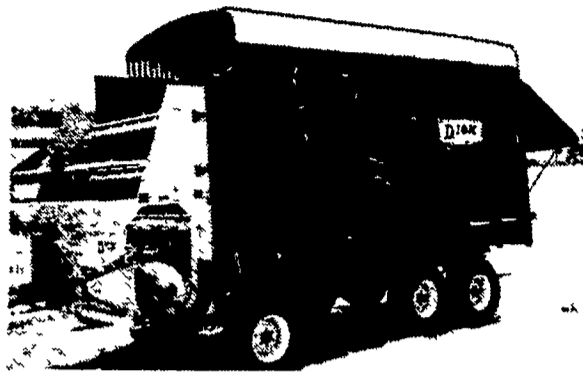
Farmers Union will also press for approval of a proposed "Fair Meat Trading Act," which would provide for licensing of commercial meat pricing reporting services and seek to assure that such prices are honestly reported and not subject to manipulation to the detriment of farmers and consumers.

"It is now clear that more than 70 per cent of the meat supply is being formula-priced, either on the basis of

the 'Yellow Sheet' or the 'Meat Sheet,' and that these prices reflect as little as two per cent of the livestock slaughter volume," he reported.

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