

Three-million farmers stayed at home

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grievances of the protesting farmers may be perfectly justifiable. Every farmer - whether he's in Washington or at home on the farm - has undoubtedly experienced some degree of frustration and failure at one time or another. And there's a limit to such results, that's agreed.

Nevertheless, there's little agreement among this country's three or four million farmers that the D.C. tractorcade is the answer to farm problems.

What's more, it's not agreed by the vast majority of farmers that America's farming scene is all that bad off. That verdict comes through especially strong in states such as Pennsylvania where livestock and poultry are dominant and where ethnic backgrounds dictate milder means of communication.

There's something to be said for the farmers who took the time and expense to tell their story in Washington. They deserve some

sympathy because the thought of perhaps losing a farm is not at all pleasant.

On the other hand, let's not neglect the message of those farmers who stayed home. Let's also not forget that our competitive system mandates efficiency, frugality, patience, a willingness to accept risks, and plenty of dedication and hard work. Farmers in Pennsylvania and many other areas across the country possess those qualities. They are positive traits and they beget positive attitudes and actions.

Driving tractors through Washington may get attention, but they may also bring sour impressions to people who have few or no other contacts with farmers. The actions of a few may in fact tarnish the image of agriculture as a whole. That would be bad news.

The goals of the D.C. tractor drivers are questionable. They want 90 per cent parity. Most farmers, however, wouldn't want that,

realizing that such prices would only spell disaster down the road.

In grain farming, for example, where much of the dissatisfaction seems to be centered, production is already record-high. Where would it be if prices were raised? The bottom line on that is if we don't have the market, we can't have the top price. The solutions are to tailor production to market demands while simultaneously keeping an eye out for new sales opportunities. It might be a skill some farmers find hard to master, but it's one they're going to have to learn.

Yes, I have some sympathy for the frustrated farmers in Washington. It's obvious that something is terribly wrong with their businesses, or they wouldn't be there. But I don't agree with their tactics, and I praise those who stayed home.

The satisfactions, joys, and even frustrations of running one's own business are prized feelings among

most farmers. They value their independence and profits and are prepared to take a financial licking now and then, rather than give up their autonomy for some arbitrary profit guarantee. That's why the majority of farmers chose not to go to Washington, D.C.

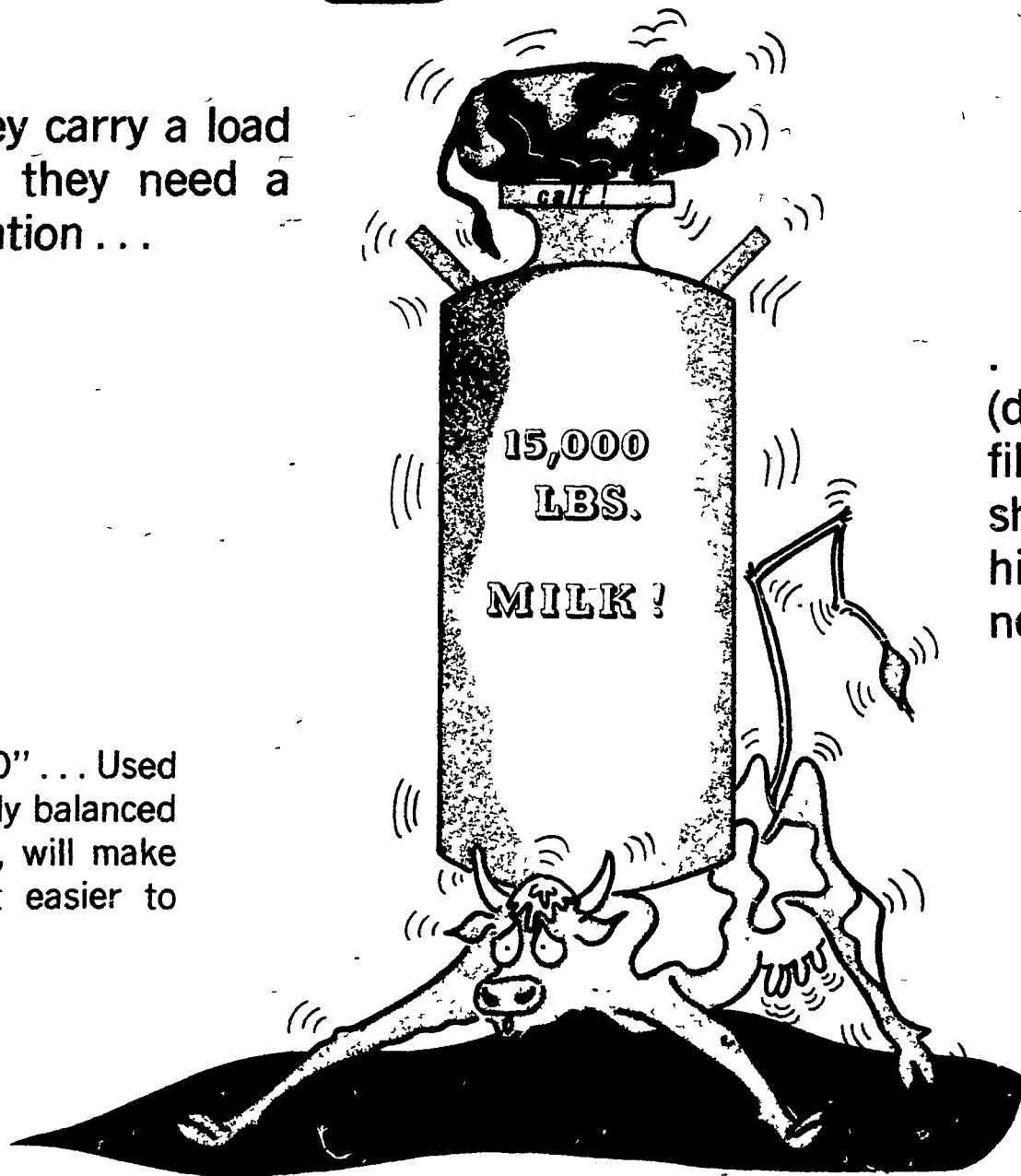
The farmers who stayed home undoubtedly realize that by pressuring the government for help, they may end up inviting a government-controlled agriculture which might not only guarantee profits, but limit them as well. Most farmers prefer to take their chances on the business side of things, rather than have the government gift-wrap something for them.

Farmers who stayed home realize that there is a delicate balance between supply and demand.

Certainly, those stay-at-home farmers have a message, and they deserve more attention than they're getting.



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