

USDA considers 1979 food policies

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Food prices, food safety, human nutrition and food aid will be important public issues in 1979, said Economist Thomas A. Stucker of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"The price of food is of primary concern to consumers. The rapid rise of retail food prices, averaging 1.4 per cent per month in early 1978, outpaced average price rises of 0.8 per cent for all times. By year end, food price increases will still be greater than for prices generally.

Meat products are the largest single contributor to consumer food costs. They account for more than 32 per cent of the overall food-at-home price index. A large food grain harvest in 1978 will provide moderately priced food for livestock and poultry production in 1979. The expected result will be larger broiler supplies and a large increase in pork supplies, he said.

Beef prices are expected to increase again in 1979. Reduced supplies will again be the primary reason unless the breeding herd is reduced further than expected, which would lead to even tighter supplies later.

"But commodity prices are only part of the food price picture," Stucker said. "The remaining 6 per cent of retail food costs are attributable to marketing—costs for processing and distribution. The administration's wage and price guidelines may help hold marketing cost increases to lower levels than would otherwise be the case."

These factors point to smaller food price increases in 1979 unless unfavorable weather conditions reduce agricultural commodity production, as happened in early 1978. The forecast is for food prices to average 7½ per cent higher, he said.

"Food safety will continue to be an important policy

issue in 1979. Scientific evidence linking food and feed additives to human health conditions is growing. As a result, proposals to ban or otherwise regulate use of these chemicals will continue to emerge.

"The federal government is also addressing food availability and food quality as they relate to human nutrition. Funding for nutrition research and education has increased. The impacts of these increases will be felt far beyond 1979."

Stucker said nutrition education must now be provided for all participants in the growing supplemental food program for women, infants and children. A department mass media nutrition experiment will test effectiveness of television for nutrition education of children, and the national school lunch program provides day-to-day examples of nutritious meals. The department is developing and testing guidelines to help schools

reduce salt, sugar and fat content in meals.

"The country realized another major food program change in 1979," said Stucker. "The food stamp program's purchase requirement was eliminated by the Food Stamp Act of 1977. As of January 1, 1979, participants were no longer required to purchase a portion of their stamp allotment. The value of stamps received will be equal to what were formerly the free stamps, or the

difference between the amount paid by participants and the value of stamps received."

Eliminating the purchase requirement gives participants more latitude in food purchasing, said Stucker, since they are no longer have to tie up income in stamps redeemable only for food. The result may be a decrease in food purchases of participants, but the department estimates that participation will increase under new program rules.

Four Pa. men and meat firm fined

HARRISBURG - Four Pennsylvania men and a meat plant were fined a total of \$3500 by a U.S. District Court in Harrisburg for using sodium sulfite to make meat look fresh, a violation of the Federal Meat Inspection Act.

Shaffer's Abattoir, Inc., was fined \$1000, and Arthur

Shaffer, Jr., and Larry D.E. Shaffer, its vice presidents, were fined \$250 each. In addition, Robert O. Nornhold, owner of Robert Nornhold Butcher Shop, Middleburg, was fined \$500; while Robert J. Potteiger, owner of Potteiger Meats, New Kingston, was fined \$1500. The sentences were

imposed by District Court Judge R. Dixon Herman.

All had pleaded guilty to charges of preparing and selling adulterated meat products with intent to defraud.

Sodium sulfite, a chemical which can mask the normal discoloration of aging and spoiling meat, is an

adulterant and its use on meats is not permitted under federal law.

About 2000 pounds of cubed steak and ground beef were involved and is being held by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food inspectors until destroyed by the owners.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act, administered by the USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service, requires that meat products prepared and sold in interstate commerce be wholesome, unadulterated, and properly packaged and labeled.

Seed violation settled

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Fredonia Seed Co., Fredonia, N.Y., has paid \$3,075 to settle a case involving alleged violations of the Federal Seed Act. The act, administered by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, is a truth-in-labeling law designed to protect farmers and consumers who buy seed.

Clyde R. Edwards, seed official with the department's Agricultural Meeting Service (AMS), said the firm, in agreeing to the settlement, neither admitted nor denied the charges.

The case involved 11 shipments of lettuce, tomato, and onion seed to Florida, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia from 1975 through 1978. Alleged violations, while not the same for all shipments, were failure to test seed within five months before shipment, failure to keep required records, and failure to label low germination vegetable seed as being "Below Standard."

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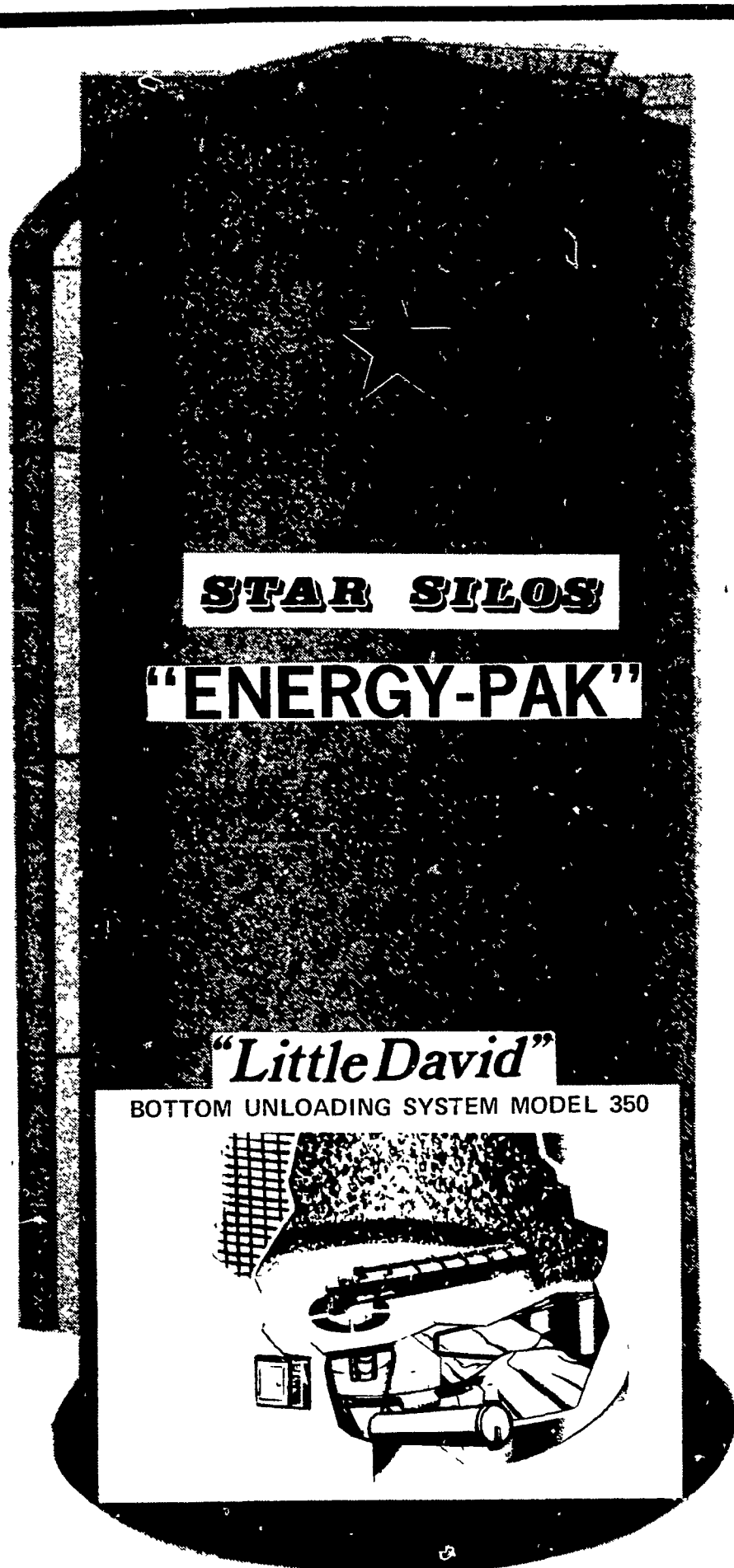
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