

Grain firm official worries over lost U.S. prestige

PALM BEACH, Fla., The U.S. grain marketing system, historically the world's most accurate price barometer, may have lost some of its prestige in the recent grain embargo, an export official said today.

Myron R. Laserson, senior vice president-merchandising, World Grain Division, Continental Grain Company, claimed that the U.S. system cannot in the future be as precise an indicator of world supply and demand as before.

"International prices tend to follow free markets," he explained.

According to Laserson, various governments around the world may "question our ability to honor our commitments". And, he added, "...this could increase their determination to be self-sufficient in food - or do without."

Working on behalf of U.S. producers, he continued, grain exporters have been driven to seek out new markets while being denied serious access to the world's largest, most important grain importer.

"The Russians got most of the grain they needed this year," Laserson pointed out, "and no doubt will make sure in the future that they never again are so complacent as to rely on the U.S. as a dependable supplier."

Paradoxically, he predicted, the embargo could benefit some farmers particularly the soft wheat producers.

Laserson expects the U.S. to produce more soft wheat than in many years, but with good demand for it.

"Our projection of U.S. soft red and white wheat exports is 385 million bushels, or 60 percent of the crop."

He reasons that "we have to expect that no matter how large the Russian wheat crop this summer...they will want to build up their reserves"

On the assumption that the USSR will be limited to three million tons from the U.S., Laserson expects that nation to maximize purchases from Argentina, while cutting exports to Eastern Europe.

Given the logistical limitations of Canada and Australia, Laserson said this leaves "the United States with presumably an open door to the price sensitive buyers of Eastern Europe."

He looks to eastern Europe, especially Poland, Yugoslavia and Rumania as a major market for wheat "Even though their crop prospects for next year are improved, we suspect that the desire to build stocks and the requirements of their

neighbor will keep them active in the market"

"The U.S. will have competition, certainly in the early part of the marketing season from the EEC, but the need for wheat exists," he continued

He noted that China and India are other important factors in the world wheat market

Laserson emphasized the demand forecast can be filled only if the grain is there and only if the grain trade is permitted to fill it

"We cannot absorb any further disruption of the marketing effort. The export activity is vital domestically and necessary internationally for the wheat

producer Without that market, he has no choice but to reduce his output and raise prices"

Laserson called for enlightened joint action among all elements of the grain industry

"We must stop the growth of parochialism in self-serving special interest groups and work instead toward cohesive policy positions"

"The industry must truly be part of the decision-making process, playing a more dominant and useful role in the shaping of its own destiny in the world food marketplace," he concluded

Md. berry auction

PRINCESS ANNE, Md — Maryland's famed strawberry auction block at Princess Anne, Somerset County, opened for the season, Thursday, May 15th, according to the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Marketing Division

Indications are that the 1980 Maryland berry season will last for 14 to 20 days. The block will open for sales at 10 a.m. each day Monday through Saturday.

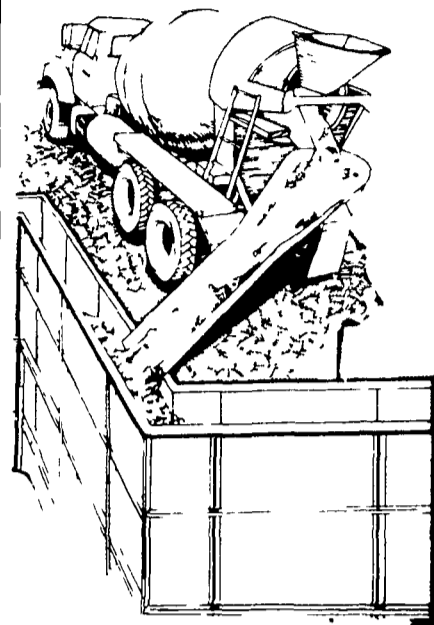
The auction is open to all buyers, large and small. Persons wishing to bid are asked to register with block

manager, Russell Bozman prior to the opening of bidding each day.

Maryland strawberries are hand picked at peak flavor and are sold on the block in units of 16-quart "crates." All berries are graded by experts from the Maryland Department of Agriculture prior to sale

Those wishing additional information on bidding and berry availability are asked to telephone Bozman at 301/651-2153 during the day and at 301/651-1265 after 5 p.m.

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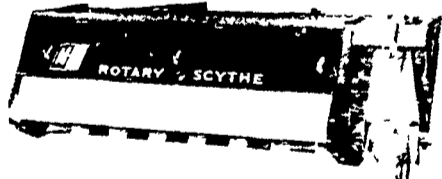
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