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**The Milk  
Check**

**TOM JURCHAK  
County Agent**

**Litmus Test**  
Everyone remembers the litmus paper used in high school chemistry classes to determine if a compound was acid or alkaline. Well, I think a good litmus test for marketing conditions is the Minnesota-Wisconsin Price Series. Even with its shortcomings it's the best

economic indicator that we have. It won't give you a uniform or blend price. But neither is it loaded with a lot of extras that can be misleading. And with 60 percent of your milk being sold at the Class II price — which is basically the M-W in Order 2 — it's a much better indicator than

ever before.

Besides, it's still the basis for determining your class prices when converted to 3.5 percent butterfat and it called the Basic Formula Price in all federal milk marketing orders.

However, even with the M-W we can be misled because it is influenced by the price support program. U.S. Department of Agriculture purchases of butter, powder and cheese are made to increase the M-W price so producers all over the country will benefit from the support program.

Keeping this in mind you can use the M-W price like the litmus paper in the chemistry class.

Looking back over the last four months since the new support price of \$12.07 was announced on April 1, the M-W price never really moved from \$11.68 in April until it increased a measly five cents in July to \$11.73 — still far below the support price of \$12.07 in spite of USDA purchases.

**Wait and Watch**

However, that five cents increase — small as it was — looked so good that a lot of people interpreted it as the beginning of the end of milk marketing problems.

There were a lot of reasons centering mainly around the heat wave in the western states. We even got some encouragement when butter

prices reached the support level for the first time since April (even though they didn't stay there).

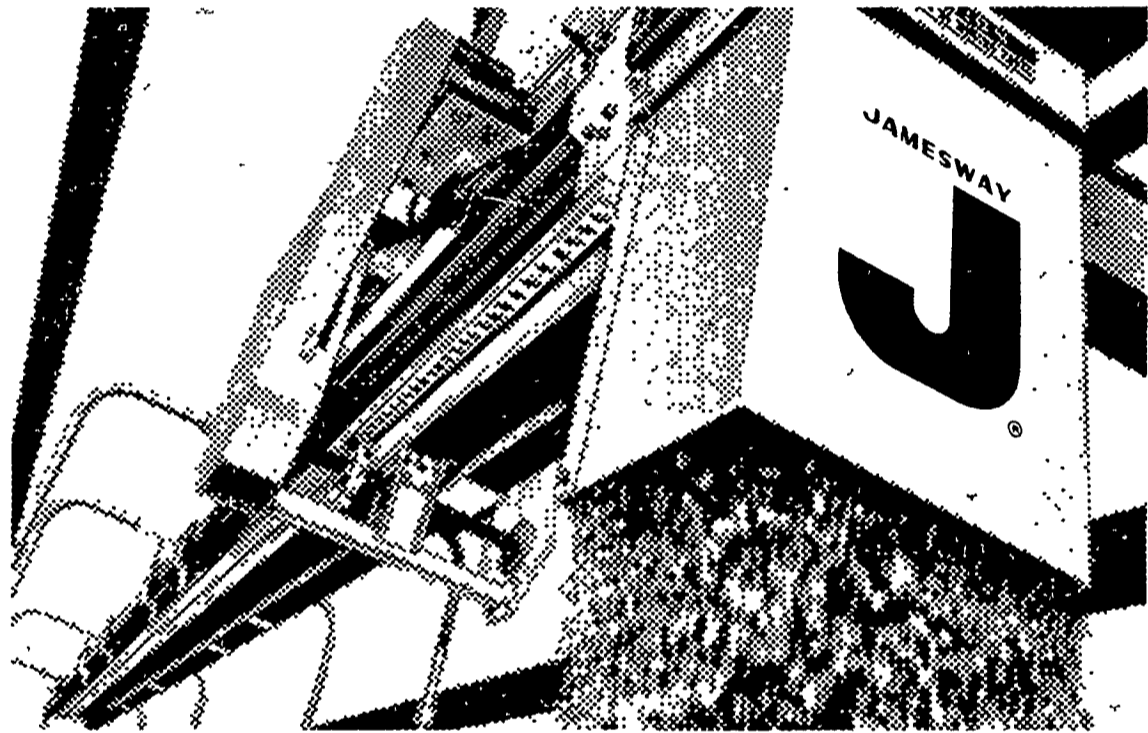
The best news of all was the decision by USDA to do nothing to delay the scheduled increase in the support price due October 1 even though we were still 49 cents below the current support level in July.

Even government purchases of butter dropped by more than two third in late July.

All of these were helpful signs that changes may be on the way. But when my litmus paper test showed only a five cent increase in the M-W this month, I decided I better wait and watch.



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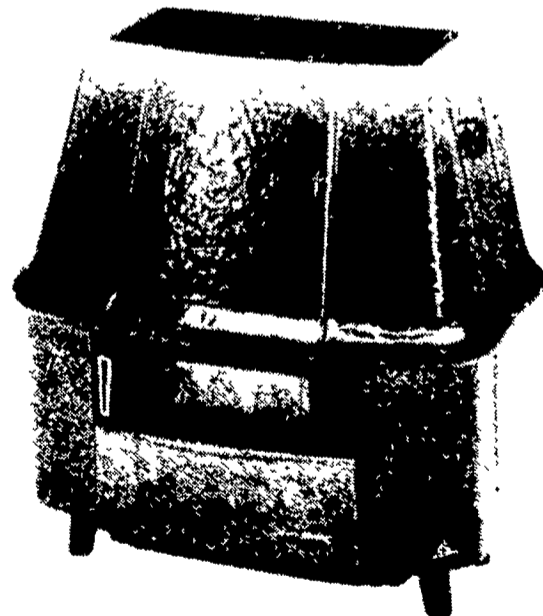
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