

Increased farm exports benefit U.S. consumers

WASHINGTON, D.C. — "Efforts to expand U.S. food production in 1981 to meet rising world food needs will not only benefit the agricultural economy — but the consumer too."

This is one of the major conclusions drawn from a new report released today by the Agriculture Council of America entitled "Clear Signals for Full Production: The Benefit for Farmers and Consumers."

ACA, an industry-wide communications link to the non-farm public, is coordinating the U.S. Export Education Project to develop a unified plan to build a stronger U.S. economy through increased farm exports in the 1980's.

"All the data so far indicates the U.S. farmers already are responding to positive signals in the marketplace, and there is an excellent chance that we will have bumper crops in 1981," declared ACA Director Paul Mullinix, a Vice President of Southern States Cooperative based in Richmond, Virginia.

The report reflects broad-based input from the major grower organizations, grain cooperatives and grain companies and leading agribusiness firms.

"We recognize the growing concern about the impact of increased farm exports on food prices," said Mullinix. "That's why we are emphasizing that if the

market is left free to operate, rising world food needs will create a powerful incentive — an opportunity to earn a reasonable profit.

"Given this incentive, farmers will plant fence row to fence row — doing everything possible to increase production capacity. And this is positive news for both U.S. consumers and our customers around the world."

U.S. farm exports, totaling \$40 billion in 1980, are by far the leading positive factor in the nation's balance of trade. They are projected to reach \$48 billion in 1981 which would result in a record breaking \$30 billion trade surplus for U.S. agriculture.

"Purchasing groceries on

almost a daily basis and always in cash, it's very easy to lose perspective," Mullinix continued. "Sure food prices have gone up — but not as fast as the overall inflation rate — and considerably less than other major necessities."

Mullinix cited the following "if/then" computations to show the value of food products compared to important non-food items:

If red meat prices had increased at the same rate as energy prices over the past 20 years, then round steak would now cost \$4.04 per pound, and pork chops would cost \$3.24 per pound.

If egg prices had gone up at the same rate as medical costs over the past 20 years,

then large eggs would be selling for \$1.77 per dozen.

If poultry prices had gone up at the same rate as housing costs over the past 20 years, then frying chicken would cost \$1.15 per pound.

"When you get down to the bottom line: despite record levels of farm exports in 1979 and 1980, food prices are still running two to three percent below the general rate of inflation," Mullinix added.

The ACA report cautioned that direct government intervention in the market — such as a grain embargo or mandatory price controls — should be avoided at all costs, short of the most serious national security considerations.

"Such government actions may appear to some to offer a 'quick fix'. But in fact they merely add to the problem, since they reduce the incentive to expand production."

"Let's keep in mind how increased farm exports strengthen the U.S. economy," Mullinix emphasized. "In 1980 they generated \$82 billion in domestic economic activity — providing employment for 1.13 million workers — some 630,000 in the non-farm sector."

Another conclusion of the report summarized the critical dependence of foreign nations on U.S. exports to meet world food needs. Today, American farmers produce nearly 60 percent of all the grain that enters world trade. Production from one-third of U.S. cropland (over 110 million harvested acres) — is exported.

"No other country comes close to America's ability to meet future world demand

for food and feed grains and oilseeds," concluded Mullinix.

"The long-run effect on American consumers of meeting this challenge is definitely beneficial. Because steady export market growth means greater efficiency and a larger volume of food production. It will provide us with the foreign exchange needed to buy a larger quantity and wider selection of imported necessities."

A Blue Ribbon Committee — 35 leaders representing every major segment of U.S. agriculture — is overseeing the development of a "Blueprint for Export Expansion" that includes specific recommendations for maximum feasible expansion of U.S. farm exports between now and 1990.

The first draft of the plan is being distributed extensively by Members of Congress to prominent constituents who are responding individually to tentative recommendations.

All responses to the first draft plan will be considered in a second draft to be presented at a National Conference on Farm Export Strategies for the Eighties scheduled for February 9-11, 1981 in Washington, D.C.

Following the conference, important features of the plan will be presented in a nationwide public education program. Efforts will focus on reaching audiences in major urban centers across the country.

Anyone interested in receiving more information on the project, should write: U.S. Farm Export Education Project, P.O. Box 23421, Washington, D.C. 20024.



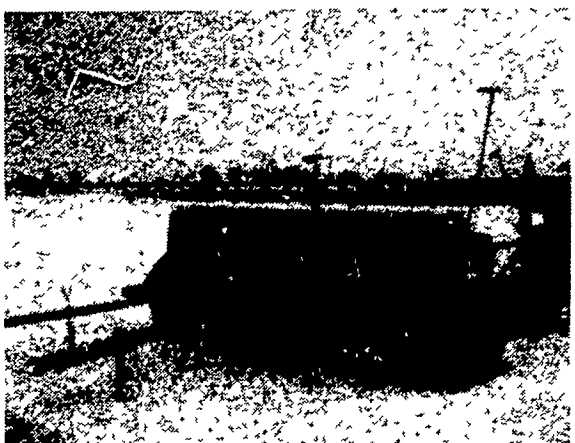
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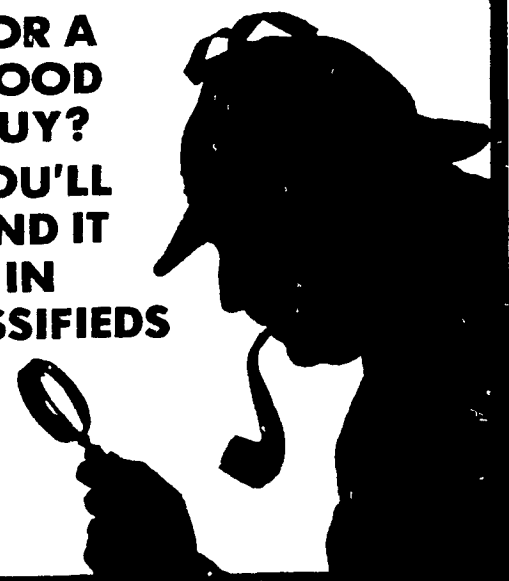
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