

Farm Talk

(Continued from Page D2)
is a major dealer in grain futures through another subsidiary.)

Some observers think the competition in the beef business is good — that the big four are struggling with each other and that farmers benefit because of premium prices offered to lure new customers.

But in the long run, only a few big companies will survive while hundreds of small packers go out of business. And when that happens, those few survivors will be in a position to decide what they pay for beef on the hoof and what consumers will pay for the finished product.

Farmers in the Corn Belt are already feeling the impact of the big processors. For example, Iowa Beef Processors buys up to 25 percent of the fed cattle in the Corn Belt. And in large multi-county areas surrounding its major plants, it may buy as much as 80 percent of the fed cattle.

That means cattle producer have few alternatives. It's a long way between markets and with the growing cost of transportation cattle feeders are almost captives of the big processors.

Government sources say it's already difficult to find any competition for the very large boxed beef plants. They offer virtually the only market for cattle producers 100 mile radius of these plants.

A few years back when there were many small packers, a cattle-producer had a choice of where to ship. The producer could check around for the best price within

easy travel distance and maybe have three or four bids. But now it's either sell to one of the biggies or travel great distance at high cost. And that eats into profit.

The Packers and Stockyards Administration, an agency of the Department of Agriculture, has tested the monopolistic trend in the beef business but hasn't gotten too far. An injunction request filed against Iowa Beef Processors in 1977 was turned down by a federal judge. A government source says that was, because of a poorly prepared case and an unwillingness of local cattle producers to testify.

If the meat business continues to evolve, you can bet there will be no more than two or three big firms that will control it all by the end of this decade. If that meant two or three companies competing against each other in any given market it might be all right, but that isn't the way it works.

Chances are pretty good that those big companies would carve up the territory and that would mean one bid, one price to the farmer for beef and pork, and it could also mean that consumers would have fewer brand choices and the potential for prices even higher than they would need to be.

It seems to me it's time for the Packers and Stockyards Administration to take another hard look at the meat business. No doubt there are unbearable pressures being applied to let things follow their present course. But that course sounds like a meat monopoly and I don't think consumers or farmers would benefit from that.

'Big' changes ahead for apple growers

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Commercial apple growers should pay heed to the hard lessons being learned by the U.S. automobile industry concerning efficiency and compactness, says Arthur H. Thompson, professor of horticulture at the University of Maryland and a research coordinator for the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station.

Thompson is a nationally known teacher and research worker in tree fruit management. He recently delivered the first Batjer Memorial Lecture at the annual meeting of the Washington State Horticultural Association in Yakima, Wash.

The Maryland horticulturist noted both the orchards and fruit trees of tomorrow will be more compact than those of today. The trees themselves will be free-standing, i.e. they will not be supported by trellises or posts — a trend which seemed promising in the 1970'.

Apple trees in commercial orchards of the future will vary in shape and configuration, depending on market and growing conditions, Thompson predicts.

"Phyto-engineering" will enable agricultural scientists to develop fruit trees with the proper shape for easy machine harvesting. Thus, little or no hand pruning will be required. This feat is possible

because of two recent developments in plant research, Thompson explains.

One development involves creating genetic mutations by bombarding detached shoot growth with gamma radiation. Buds so treated are then grafted to rootstocks, and grown to suitable size for evaluation of horticultural characteristics such as compactness of growth habit and fruiting ability.

Coupled with the "induced mutants" process is the recent development of mass propagation of plants by tissue culture. This process offers potential for asexual production of millions of plants from a single parent.

The advantage of tissue culture is that it could enable nursery growers to propagate, for example, a compact mutant of the

Delicious apple on its own roots, Thompson explains. Thus, the high-labor tasks of grafting and budding would be eliminated.

Along with the increased use of mechanical harvesting, commercial apple orchardists in the United States might thus be in a better position to meet the ever-increasing need for production efficiency in a highly competitive world market.

A good-sized share of this economic squeeze is being forced on U.S. commercial apple growers by political and social decisions at the federal and state government levels which make it continually more difficult to obtain an adequate supply of harvest laborers at reasonable cost, the Maryland research worker declared.

Broiler placements up

HARRISBURG — Placements of broiler chicks in the Commonwealth during the week ending May 2 were 2,473,000, according to the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service.

The placements were seven percent above the corresponding week a year earlier and one percent above the previous week. Average placements during the past nine weeks were two percent

above a year ago. Placements in the 21 key poultry producing states were 85,791,000, slightly above the previous week and four percent above the same week a year ago.

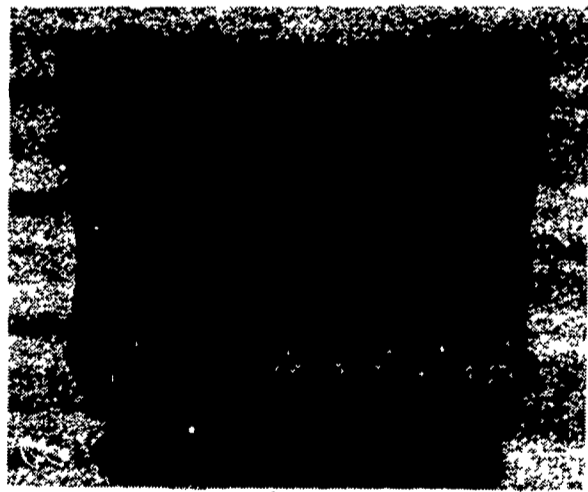
Broiler-fryers slaughtered in Pennsylvania under federal inspection during the week ending April 22 totaled 1,460,000 with an average liveweight of 3.88 pounds.

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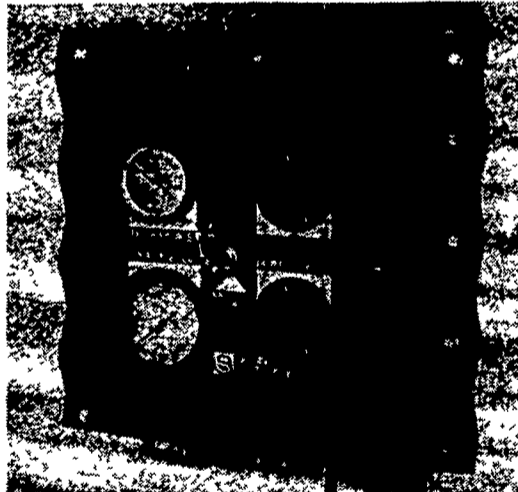
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