

# Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

## Don't sell promotion short

Is it worth the investment to try to convince consumers to eat certain food items?

Obviously, the big food companies like General Foods and Standard Brands are sure that they can spend big bucks and get consumers to buy almost any food product. But can farmers' associations and commodity groups do anything about consumer acceptance of their farm products? Some folks are betting that they can.

Dairy farmers are putting money into a national effort to convince consumers that milk is a nutritious, wholesome product well worth the price. They're not trying to sell brands, just the idea of drinking milk. Any brand. Any they're competing with Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, and Seven-Up in the

soft-drink market. A current slogan says, "Milk, It's the Soft, Soft Drink."

In Ontario, Canada, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is spending lots of money promoting Ontario farm products. I picked up some of their literature recently while attending a meeting up there. Those folks are reaching Ontario consumers in a variety of ways through their Foodland Ontario promotion and the accompanying slogan, "Good Things Grow In Ontario."

The whole campaign is pitched at one simple point—encouraging Ontario consumers to eat Ontario-grown farm produce. The ministry isn't wasting any money chasing after the export market or trying to get its produce shipped into other provinces. It simply wants

the home folks to eat home-grown food.

Here's how the ministry spells out the problem:

"Canada produces a wealth of food products, and can produce even more. In spite of this, we continue to import more and more food.

"Since 1971, the volume of food imports into Canada has increased by 90 percent. And over 50 percent of our imports are products which can be produced in Canada.

"These imports are frequently more costly than our own products. They also are a threat to Canadian employment. The Canadian Food Processors Association has estimated that imported processed fruit and vegetables alone cost Canada more than 14½ million man-hours of Canadian labor. This amounts to a wage loss of close to 65 million dollars."

With that as the basis, the ministry set out to do something about it. Ontario is Canada's largest agricultural producer, and thus the area that would be hurt most by imported foods.

All they're asking Ontario consumers to do is to buy Ontario products whenever possible. To encourage this, a variety of campaigns have been mounted under the overall banner of the Foodland Ontario program.

The Foodland Ontario symbol and the slogan "Good Things Grow In Ontario" were developed to identify Ontario food products. And according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food literature, they are increasingly seen on retail food store price cards and shelf strips. And they appear more and

more on packaging and on consumer information material from many Ontario producers, processors and retailers.

Along with this, Foodland Ontario has mounted an extensive advertising campaign to promote the symbol and a wide range of Ontario-grown food products.

The campaign has two basic messages. First to make people aware of the wide variety of top quality food products available in Ontario, and secondly, to remind consumers that buying Ontario food products is important in keeping the province's economy strong. To do this, Foodland Ontario uses television, newspapers, billboards, transit and mall posters, and almost anything else that will help tell the story.

The advertising effort is backed up with a variety of other services, including a program to reach the important restaurant and institutional market, a program to help agricultural producer groups with market development, and a promotion and public relations campaign that supplies the media with information about production and marketing and the use of Ontario food products. That includes recipes, photos and point-of-purchase material.

Since its inception, the Foodland Ontario symbol and message has become widely known. Market research shows that nine out of ten Ontario consumers support the effort to encourage the purchase of Ontario-produced foods. And sales of Ontario agricultural products have shown spectacular gains. Another recent survey reveals that

more than half of all consumers are aware of the Foodland Ontario symbol and what it means.

So what does all this mean for local farmers and consumers? Well, it seems to me good things also grow around here, and a lot more good things could grow if there were good markets for them.

Maybe consumers could benefit through a broader range of local produce that would be fresher, of higher quality, maybe even more economical. Maybe it's time for some effective local promotion to make sure residents are aware of the local food products available to them and are then able to go into the stores and find those products readily identifiable.

Fourteen years ago I suggested the Delmarva Poultry Industry Association experiment with marketing Delmarvalous chicken. It was my contention that there was an identifiable product there that at least local consumers, if not regional and national, could be convinced to buy.

I was told back then by industry insiders that it wasn't a good idea. That you couldn't brand label chickens and make the effort worthwhile.

Well, the Delmarvalous chicken label never made the supermarkets, but some others did. So you can sell brand labeled chicken. In fact, you can sell brand labeled almost anything if it's a good product and if it's properly promoted.

So why not promote locally grown food products so consumers will know they're getting local produce?

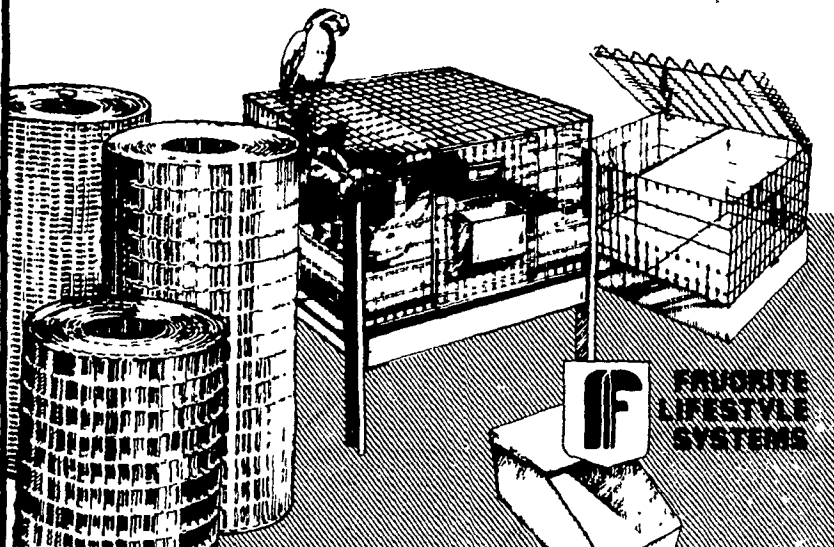
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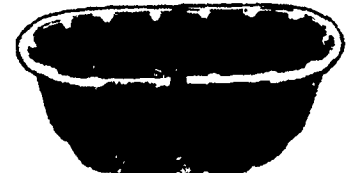


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