



Off the Sounding Board

By Sheila Miller, Editor

Same old story

It sounded like a broken record on Tuesday as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Agriculture Penrose Hollowell and dairy leaders from across the state "brain-stormed" their way to a consensus of opinion on what to do about U.S. Secretary of Agriculture John Block's 50-cent assessment on each 100 pounds of milk that's sold.

After two and a half hours of round-robin debate, these dairy leaders had come up with the brilliant idea to petition Block to delay his 50 cent assessment "substantially." During this period (however long a substantial delay is), ideas on what to do about the dairy surplus problem would be formulated and shipped down to USDA headquarters.

What, you mean Pennsylvania's dairy leaders have nothing more concrete than that to offer in response to Block's plan after having known about the 50 cent assessment since August? Even if they would have picked one of the many dairy programs that surfaced at this summer's Kansas City seminar (all of which Congress later threw out) and tossed it back in the hat for consideration, it would have shown more direction.

But what credibility would our recommendations have anyway in Washington? want to promote their product with the vote-down of the state's milk referendum in June?

So other than promotion and increased consumption, it would seem the only alternative to the dairy surplus situation is less production. And that's what Block seems to think his 50-cent assessment will do.

Since dairy farmers have been crying, "We were only responding to signals sent by the U.S. government when they increased price support," as reasons for their increased production, then it would only stand to reason that a possible \$12.10 per hundredweight price support next spring should have an inverse effect and consequently bring prices down. But will it?

Some dairy farmers already have threatened to put on more cows if Block's assessment recoups 50 cents from their monthly milk check. More cows mean more milk — so nothing would be solved there.

It's not hard to understand why, in the eyes of USDA, dairy farmers haven't learned much since April 1981 and the first dairy price support freeze. Just this month, USDA figures showed milk production continuing on its merry upward trend. The three-month production from July to September poured in at 33.8 billion pounds, up 2.3 percent from a year ago and 5 percent higher than for the same period in 1980.

Despite the rhetoric that has been going up and down dairy pipelines to and from Washington, dairy farmers have not reduced production or herd sizes. As a matter of fact, there are more cows now with higher production.

Milk cows numbered 11,026,000 during the July-September period — that's up one percent from a year earlier and up 0.4 of one percent from April-June, and the highest for any quarter on record since January-June 1980. Production per cow averaged 3,070 pounds (for the three months) — up 1½

percent from a year earlier and 3 percent above that of two years ago.

And for the argument that it's not Pennsylvania's problem, take a look at USDA's hit-list for overproducers. Pennsylvania was listed among the five top leaders with 2.31 billion pounds. Leading the pack was Wisconsin with 5.8 billion pounds, then came California with 3.77 billion pounds, followed by New York with 2.74 billion pounds, and Minnesota with 2.4 billion pounds.

Yes, out of those five states, we produced the least amount. But look again. Our production was tied with Minnesota's for showing the highest increase percentage-wise. Pennsylvania's and Minnesota's production increased 3 percent as compared to Wisconsin's 1 percent, California's 2 percent, and New York's 1 percent.

With those kinds of figures already on USDA's books, no one is betting on whether or not dairy producers have already exceeded the Commodity Credit Corporation limit of 5 billion pounds of surplus dairy purchases which would trigger the 50 cent deduction. As a matter of fact, there have been reports that CCC purchases have hit the 13.5 billion pound level.

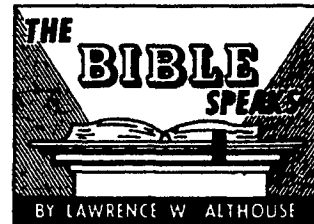
So, unless dairy producers and leaders put their thinking caps on in a hurry and come up with a better idea during the 45-day comment period, it looks like our milk checks will be coming up on the short side after the November elections. Just an empty plea to "give us some more time to think" probably won't make much of an impression in Washington.

About the best ideas we've heard skimming off dairy producer's minds include:

- ✓ Making sure the 50-cent assessment (if and when deducted) is earmarked for dairy promotion and research, at least in part, and not dumped in a general CCC account;
- ✓ Regionalize the assessment based on total pounds of CCC dairy purchases;
- ✓ Work toward a quota system where those dairy farmers who are already cutting back production won't be penalized by having to pay an assessment. Pay a premium price for milk to those producers who reduce production, a flat rate for those who stay the same, and a reduced rate for dairy farmers who continue to increase production to excess.
- ✓ Restrict casein imports; and
- ✓ Continue to work on better labeling laws and ways to incorporate milk and other dairy products into the diets of the 1980s' consumers. Remembering what the per capita consumption of dairy products was a decade ago is like crying over spilled milk.

There already is a better urban awareness of the dairy situation — even if farmers don't always like the way their cases are presented in the press. More nonfarm consumers are looking for REAL seals, and many food products are boasting the fact that they use real cheese, cream, etc.

It's only a matter of time until dairy farmers will be responding to the surges of supply and demand — either because of government rules or because of ideas for promotion and production programs which they, themselves, have developed and suggested.



THE YEAR OF JUBILEE
October 24, 1982

Background Scripture: Leviticus 25.

Devotional Reading: Leviticus 26:3-5, 40-46.

The Book of Leviticus is not one of the most popular of the Old Testament. You are not likely to hear many sermons preached from it, nor to have committed any of it to memorization. To many, it seems a book written for the ancient past and not for today.

Yet there are very important issues in Leviticus that are relevant to our own time. This is particularly true of the provision for sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee. In preparation for entering the promised land, God commanded the people through Moses to practice a sabbath ecology in their use of the land he would give them: "...six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruits; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard" (25:3,4).

The Land is Mine

Too often we regard God's commandments as the imposition of arbitrary requirements, but this passage makes it clear that the sabbath is intended, not to make us "toe the mark," but to preserve what God puts into our hands. There is a recognition that in

nature there must be a cycle of work and rest if productivity is to be preserved for future generations. The sabbath idea is a restraint against unbridled exploitation and exhaustion of the natural world. How strange, then, that today so many avowed Christians are either indifferent or even violently hostile to stewardship and ecological concerns!

Leviticus also enunciates another truth that is often overlooked or ignored by us: "the land is mine; for you are strangers and so-journers with me" (25:23). Israel was indeed the promised land to the Hebrews, but Israel belongs to God, not Israel. The tribes of Israel are but temporary inhabitants — "so-journers." Their continuance in the land of Canaan was to be dependent upon their conventional relationship with the Lord, not some natural or legal right. (Whatever the basis for the existence and perpetuity of the modern nation of Israel, it is not a Biblical basis, for the Bible makes it clear that the lands belong, not to any nation, but to God.)

And Proclaim Liberty

This brings us to the Year of Jubilee commandment. In this observance, God is concerned not only with the ecology of the land, but also the ecology of people. In this year the Jews shall refrain from sowing, reaping and gathering, and it shall be a year of liberation: "And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (25:10).

The year 1998 will be the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of modern Israel. I do not know if a Year of Jubilee is planned, but I hope so, for there is no way that Israel could celebrate the Year of Jubilee without proclaiming liberty to the Palestinians who are captive in its West Bank.

And if then, why not now?

NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin

Lancaster County Agriculture Agent
Phone 717-394-6851



To Be Careful Around Manure Pits

This is the time of year that many liquid manure pits will be cleaned-out and spread on the land; the crops have been harvested and the ground is open enough to absorb much of the liquid; this is necessary rather than to apply it on frozen ground. A pass over the field with a disc will reduce the possibility of odors a great deal.

When these pits are emptied there is a danger of poisonous gases being present. If the mixture is agitated before being moved than good ventilation must be provided above the pit. Also, never go into a pit without a gas mask or some type of respirator. Keep in mind that these gases can be explosive as well as poisonous to man and beast. Special care is needed in and around liquid manure pits.

To Graze Cautiously

We receive many phone calls concerning the dangers of pasturing forage crops after being frosted. All of the permanent grasses such as bluegrass, orchard grass or bromegrass can be safely grazed at any time of the year; this is also true of any of the small grain cover crops such as rye, wheat or barley. All of these are not toxic when frozen and usually do not present any bloating problems.

However, the legumes such as clover and alfalfa should be grazed very carefully. They are not toxic, after being frosted, but will cause severe bloating if consumed while the frost is on the leaves. Allow the

frost to thaw, and the plants to dry off before turning in the herd or flock.

Also, any of the sudan grasses or sorghum hybrids should not be grazed for at least a week after being frozen. Neither should the new growth, after being frozen, be consumed.

To Evaluate Farm Records

The 1982 cropping season is about over and soon it will be time to summarize your farm accounts and be reporting to the Internal Revenue Service. In addition to the need of good farm records for tax reporting purposes, I'd like to suggest these farm records be used for future farm planning and in making major farm decisions. When time permits and as the outside work winds down this fall, it is good management to spend some time in your office and do some "pencil pushing" regarding the most profitable parts of your farming business. Your records of success or failure of the various enterprises are the best guide to future expansion or termination.

To Reduce Egg Breakage

Egg breakage is costing poultry producers a great deal. You would be surprised how much. Some poultrymen do not realize how many eggs they are losing because they do not keep track of them. In studies where this has been checked carefully, we find the percentage of eggs broken ranging from 2% to 5% up to 20%.

With a flock of 30,000 layers averaging 70% production, a loss

(Turn to Page A12)

