



Off the Sounding Board

By Sheila Miller, Editor

Snow job

Dairy farmers across the state who thought last week's blizzard snowed them under are in for another bury-me-alive storm. But this time, instead of being wet precipitation drifting down from the sky as frozen hexagonal flakes, the snow job that threatens the dairy farmers will be shreds of paper as they find their comments on the 50-cent assessment being torn apart by John Block.

While the National Milk Producers Federation dairy proposal was just a few hours old, Block already passed judgement on it as "complicated" and unworkable. And yet, NMPF's plan did for dairy what diversion payments did for grain — farmers would receive an incentive payment for not producing.

This incentive, coupled with a price punishment for overproduction of milk, seems to be a workable, sensible solution to dairy overproduction. The money discounted from the overzealous dairy farmers' paychecks when their milk production exceeds their allotted bases would serve as a just reward to those dairy farmers who voluntarily cut back.

A similar idea was generated recently by the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association dairy committee. Their dairy proposal calls for a temporary three-tiered pricing system that also pays a \$2 premium price per hundredweight to the farmers who reduce production (not to exceed \$50,000 per year), with overproducers receiving an equally reduced price. Farmers who would stay on an even keel would receive the current support price of \$13.10.

Termination of the dairy program proposed by PFA would be triggered not by the calendar but by a production goal. A production level of 103 percent of market needs, or 3.5-4 billion pounds of Commodity Credit Corporation purchases was suggested as a "reasonable and safe goal."

Once the production reduction goal has been achieved, the PFA plan calls for automatic indexing in order to maintain a fair price and prevent future imbalances.

They suggest the support level should be adjusted on an annual basis by the Secretary of Agriculture based on CCC purchases of dairy stocks for the previous 12 months. The support level would range from 60-90 percent of parity and would be indexed to purchases of 2-11.6 billion pounds. At a four billion pound goal, the price support would be 76 percent of parity, PFA points out.

This plan seems to have a lot going for it, too, and should appeal to most dairy farmers. But, will Block also term this plan too cumbersome for USDA employees to deal with?

We can't see that the paperwork involved in these two plans could be any more com-

plicated than what Block plans to tackle in refunding his second 50-cents.

Speaking of refunds, perhaps Milk Marketing Inc.'s dairy plan might appeal to Block.

Calling for a continued tie to the parity concept, while at the same time serving as an incentive to producers to reduce milk production, MMI's proposal suggests amending the present price support law so that "effective April 1, 1983, if a producer reduces production, the producer could have refunded the entire dollar assessment instead of only 50 cents of the assessment."

The Ohio-based dairy cooperative points out that it realizes additional assessments might be needed to provide sufficient incentive to producers to bring milk supply in line with demand. It also calls for additional expenditures for advertising and promotion from all dairy producers in the nation.

Using MMI's ideas, Block could have his cake and farmers could eat too. The Ag Secretary could watch as his dairy plan was implemented, and dairy farmers could anticipate having their taxes refunded as their production drops.

But that seems to be where the snag comes in. Will farmers be waiting forever for USDA to return their dollars once the money becomes lost in bureaucratic programs? If we believe Block, the matter could be as simple as returning the second 50 cents to any production-cutting dairy farmer.

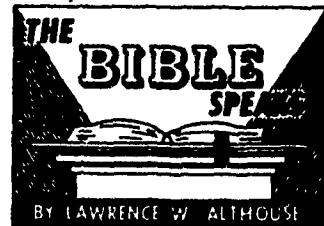
As all these dairy proposals begin to swirl like a snow squawl through our minds, it's hard to know what John Block will like — much less what every dairy farmer will condone. But the problem remains — overproduction, and what to do about it.

Take heed of the warning issued by one USDA undersecretary who said: "The dairy industry risks losing their support program entirely if they don't come up with something we can agree on. The program served producers and consumers well since 1949 — I'd hate to have dairy farmers lose it now."

Time is running out. Dairy farmers need to get their ideas across to USDA officials and Congressmen on how they plan to solve the dairy surplus problem — the matter is in our hands, as USDA looks to move ahead with the 50-cent plan once the public comment period closes.

So pick up those pens and jot off any ideas to: Director, Analysis Division, USDA-ASCS, P.O. Box 2415, Room 3741-S, Washington, D.C. 20013.

Twenty cents spent now to send a letter to Block could save dairy farmers thousands of dollars in the end.



AT A DISTANCE
February 20, 1983

Background Scripture:
Luke 23.
Devotional Reading:
Luke 23:18-25.

Two years ago, my wife, Valere, bought me a beautiful cross and chain to wear around my neck. As one who had never worn any jewelry, save my University of Pennsylvania class ring and a wedding band, I had to give some time and effort to adjust to this new addition.

Yet, even quite apart from my lack of experience with personal jewelry, I felt somewhat uneasy about wearing that cross. Despite its beauty, I realized that a cross can weigh heavily upon one's conscience.

THEY CRUCIFIED HIM

The cross has become an accepted religious symbol and art object. But when Jesus was crucified, the cross was regarded as a terrible thing of shame and suffering. There was nothing beautiful about the cross to which Jesus was nailed. If anything, the cross represented the ultimate defeat for Jesus, the very worst that men could do to him.

Luke tells us that "all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things." Even his followers didn't want to get any closer to the cross than they had to. On that day, the

cross seemed to represent his failure as Messiah. Later, however, they would look upon the cross as the symbol of their failure, not his. On that day they had failed him and the cross would ever remind them.

To Jesus the cross meant physical suffering and pain. First he had to bear its weight upon his back. Later, as he hung upon it, it drained him of what life he had left. It was an agonizing experience and the mental and spiritual torment intensified his misery. He knew that he was suffering unjustly — an innocent man, he was the victim of a vile plot. He was mocked and abused by the crowds and even one of his fellow prisoners reviled him.

FATHER, FORGIVE

Yet, the cross speaks to us of more than human depravity. It speaks also of divine redemption. For, from the cross, Jesus uttered those words which revealed, not only his own soul but the essence of the Godhead as well: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." From the cross Jesus was proclaiming that, when human beings have done their worst, God is still able to do his best and God's best is stronger than the worst of human behaviour. The victory of Christ on the cross is that the awful reality of human sin could not take away Christ's even greater capacity to love and redeem.

Thus, the cross has come to represent to the followers of Christ the power of God to overcome and redeem human evil. In that sense, it is the most beautiful of all symbols for it proclaims the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is nothing wrong in wearing the cross — so long as we do not forget that the essence of following our Lord is bearing the cross.

NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin

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To Appreciate Snow

I have heard it said that there is no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather. Well, some may not agree with that but we can agree that snow cover can be very helpful. Very cold weather without snow cover is extremely hard on winter wheat and barley, on strawberries, and on many kinds of shrubbery. The snow helps keep the ground warmer and prevents drying out of the soil around the plant roots. With long periods of very cold weather without snow cover, we'll have dehydration of the plants and a good possibility of winter kill in the spring.

Snow cover also prevents the heaving out of alfalfa plants and strawberry plants. Without snow during long periods of freezing and thawing, the plant roots will work out of the ground. Yes, snow is good weather for the farmer.

To Take A Correspondence Course
To become knowledgeable about a certain subject and continue with your normal job is a possibility. Penn State offers a number of Correspondence Courses in agriculture and related areas that should be of great help to everyone. These lessons are sent by mail and are practical at a very nominal cost. Details are available at any Extension Office in the state and a leaflet describing the various courses is available. Don't overlook this method of learning more about a special subject.

To Prepare for Spring

This is a very pleasant thought after so much snow and cold weather but, after looking at the calendar, we must realize that

spring is just a month away. Over the year's I'm aware that many gardens and tobacco beds have been seeded, or prepared, on or around St. Patrick's Day - March 17. That means that garden seeds and fertilizer supplies should be on hand ready for the season. Farmers who plan to broadcast alfalfa or red clover in their stands of winter wheat should have the seeds on hand. The choice of varieties and of top quality seeds should be much better now than later in the spring when there will be "line-ups" waiting for supplies.

To Start Pigs Right

Managing your pigs and getting them off to a good start can be somewhat difficult during periods of cold weather.

Purchased feeder pigs raised on different farms and placed together for sale must be handled carefully. The goal of management is simply to maintain or improve the health of the animal before placing it on a rapid gaining ration. Young feeder pigs must have a warm, dry, draft-free sleeping area with good ventilation. Straw bedding can be used in conventional livestock buildings. A "hover area" with heat bulbs may be used when floor heat is not available in concrete-floored feeding units. Air currents or drafts must be eliminated in either open-front structures or with conventional buildings.

Water medication has proven successful for many swine feeders. Newly arrived feeder pigs are often stressed and in many cases will consume medicated water before they will eat medicated feed.

OUR READERS WRITE, AND OTHER OPINIONS

Ag ahead

An exciting decade is ahead for U.S. agricultural research.

Many of the great agricultural revolutions are still ahead of us. "We are still using only one percent of the world's 350,000 species of plants and depend on less than 20

of them for our major food and fiber crops.

Breakthroughs are coming in biological nitrogen fixation to reduce use of fertilizers. In time, farmers will benefit from enhanced photosynthesis to improve plant efficiency and crop yields. And genetic research is in progress to produce rapid

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