

Dairy bill passes Congress, awaits Reagan's approval

WASHINGTON — A House-Senate Conference Committee last week approved a compromise to H.R. 3385, a bill making modifications in the Federal dairy and tobacco programs. The modified bill passed both the House and Senate by a voice vote late last week. The bill will soon be presented to President Reagan, he will have 10 days to sign or veto it.

The dairy provisions of the bill establish a 15-month paid diversion program to reduce milk production. It also lowers the milk support price and requires a 50 cent per hundredweight reduction from the price received by producers for all milk sold to pay for the cost of the diversion program.

The conference committee accepted and expanded on the amendment offered by Senator Roger Jepsen of Iowa on the Senate floor. The amendment provides some protection to beef, pork and poultry producers by requiring the Secretary of Agriculture to provide for the orderly marketing of cull cows.

Specific dairy provisions of the bill include: Price support: The federal support price for manufacturing-grade milk (used in making butter, cheese and nonfat powder) would be reduced, on the first day of the first month following enactment of the bill, from the current level of \$13.10 per hundredweight to \$12.00.

Paid diversion program: The Agriculture Department would offer dairy producers a chance to participate voluntarily in a 15-month program, effective from Jan. 1, 1984 to March 31, 1985, under which farmers who agree to cut production by between 5 and 30 percent would receive federal diversion payments. The payments would amount to \$10 for each hundredweight of milk production that a farmer reduces below his base level, which would be based on 1982 production, or, if the producer chooses, the average production during 1981 and 1982.

To prevent evasion of the program, the legislation includes features such as a ban on sales, leases or transfers of dairy cows from farmers participating in the program to any other person beginning November 8, 1983. Participating farmers would not be prohibited from selling cull cows for slaughter, or from selling breeding cattle under certain circumstances, but the legislation also includes several safeguards to soften the impact of that potential extra meat supply on prices for beef cattle, pork and poultry. The bill directs the Secretary of Agriculture to take all feasible steps to minimize the impact of cow marketing on beef, pork and poultry producers. To help the government gauge the potential impact of additional dairy cow marketing, producers enrolling in the program would be required to file a plan estimating how much of their milk cutback would be achieved by selling off cows for slaughter.

Dairy promotion program: The bill directs the creation of a farmer-financed national program for milk promotion and research. To fund the program, farmers would contribute an assessment amounting to 15 cents for every hundredweight of milk they market. In cases where farmers are already making contributions to local or regional promotion programs, however, they would get credit for these assessments — up to 10 cents per hundredweight — as an offset against the national assessment.

The new program would be conducted by a National Dairy Promotion and Research Board made up of dairy farmers.

Other dairy features: The Secretary of Agriculture is required to report to Congress by July 1, 1984, on the potential impact of any future action to set a higher national standard for the amount of nonfat solids in fluid milk.

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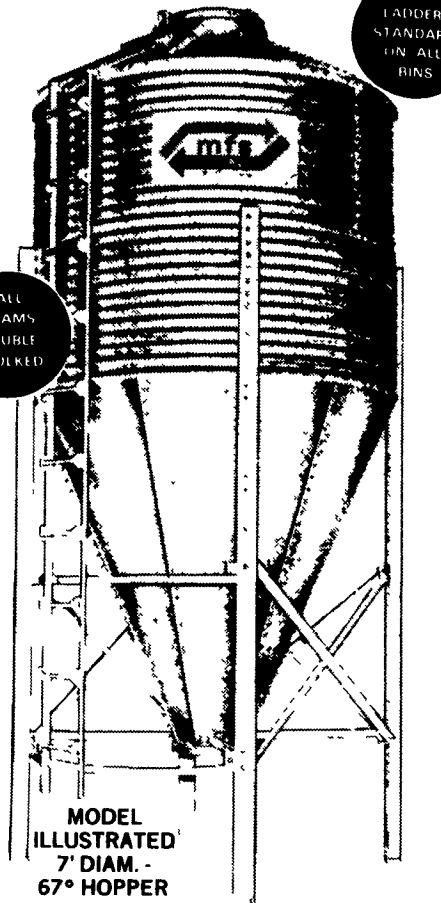
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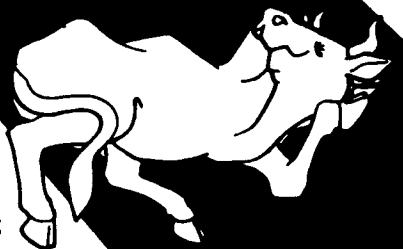
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