

Farm Talk

by
Jerry Webb

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 brings, just the idea of drinking milk.

In Ontario, Canada, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is spending lots of money promoting Ontario farm products. 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 are also a threat to Canadian

employment. The Canadian Food Processors Associations 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 a basis, the ministry set out to do something about it, because 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 con-

...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 to help keep 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 10 Ontario women 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 of this mean for Delmarva farmers and consumers? Well, it seems to me good things also grown on Delmarva, and a lot more good things could

grow if there were good markets for them. And maybe consumers could benefit through a broader range of local produce that would be fresher, of higher quality, maybe even more economical.

How about some effective local promotion to make sure Delmarva residents are aware of the local food products available to them? Then they must be able to go into the stores and find those products readily identifiable.

More than 15 years ago, I suggested that the Delmarva Poultry Industry Association experiment with marketing Delmarvalous chicken. It was my contention that there was an identifiable product there and that at least local customers, if not

regional and national, could be convinced to buy home-grown poultry. 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 and the concept has been proven correct. 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 Delmarva grown food products so at least local consumers will know they're getting local produce?

MMI gives equity refunds

STRONGSVILLE, Oh. - More than \$1.5 million of equity refunds will be returned to the dairy farmer members of Milk Marketing Inc. (MMI) during the month of December, according to Don Schriver, director of membership relations and public affairs for MMI.

The board of directors has approved the cash returns to the members at the recently held board meeting in Strongsville, OH, home office location of MMI.

"With this refund for 1984 the total redemption from MMI to its members will be more than \$13 million since MMI was organized in 1978," said Schriver.

The current redemption will be to members and inactive former members who had been with the Central Ohio Cooperative Milk Producers, MILK, Inc., Cincinnati Cooperative Milk Sales Association Inc., and Wayne

Cooperative Milk Producers Inc. under a plan developed before the 1978 merger. All equities with the total value of over \$18 million from the predecessor cooperatives will be redeemed by 1988, according to Schriver.

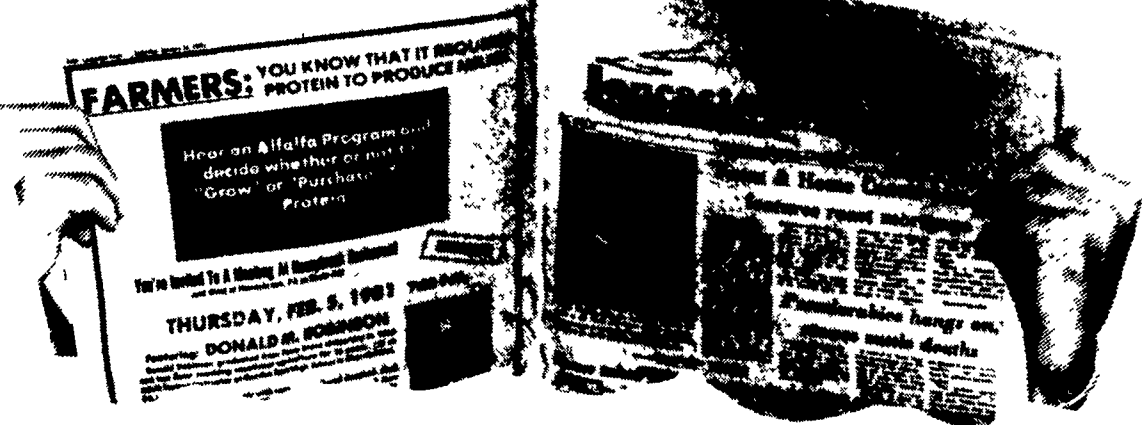
"This is in line with board policy to have a 10 year revolving plan for member financing of the cooperative. The ability to redeem member equities is the result of MMI's commitment to keep the ownership in the hands of the users. Redemptions are paid 100 percent in cash," explained Schriver.

MMI is a 9,000 member dairy farmer owned cooperative encompassing an eight state mid-western area including Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York, Kentucky, Maryland and West Virginia. Last year MMI marketed more than 4.7 billion pounds of milk.

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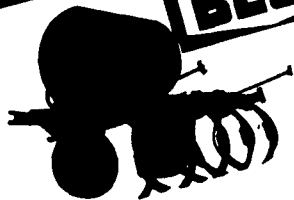


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