

Hearings on Egg Marketing Order to begin next month

BY JACK HUBLEY
LANCASTER — With sales of most livestock and poultry products in the doldrums, commodity groups continue to battle for a share of consumers' elusive food dollars.

Guided by the slogan "Let's turn it around," the egg industry hopes to pull out of its current tailspin with its latest version of the long-awaited egg marketing order. On the drawing board for several years, the marketing order is the closest the industry has ever come to implementing a nationwide self-help effort, according to United Egg Producers president Al Pope.

Pope, whose Georgia-based organization has been instrumental in developing the marketing order, came to Lancaster on Tuesday to stump for what UEP feels is the industry's best hope for revitalization. Since receiving a recent blessing from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the marketing order will be the focus of nationwide hearings to begin early next month, said Pope.

In its current form, the marketing order contains two provisions, one for promotion and research, and one for removal of surplus laying hens. The provisions are to be funded by a

one-cent-per-dozen assessment, with the money being split evenly between them. Growers with less than 10,000 layers would be exempt.

Under the promotion and research component, no less than five percent of the revenue would be earmarked for developing new products for eggs and fowl. Also, no less than five percent would be devoted to research concerning health and nutrition issues. Fifteen percent of the funds would return to the states where they were generated to assist in state-run promotion programs.

Approximately \$24 million in promotion and advertising funds would be generated during the first year of the program, Pope estimated.

Participation is optional under the surplus removal component. Here producers would be paid a premium for moving a predetermined number of layers to market before their normally scheduled slaughter date. After the birds are gone, the producer would not be permitted to restock his house until the sell-early period had expired.

Marketing order funds would be administered by a 21-member board overseen by USDA. The board would determine when the



Al Pope

nationwide egg supply warranted activating the surplus removal provision. Producers would then be able to submit a bid proposal to market their birds early.

The board reserves the right to increase the check-off amount by no more than one cent per dozen in 1/4-cent increments. The board can also reduce or eliminate either provision if funds are unused or if reserves are being maintained.

In its present form, the marketing order lacks a controversial quantity control provision that was part of the first

marketing order draft and would have established production quotas for egg producers.

Some producers, including Mark Widerman of Adams County, feel that the teeth were removed from the marketing order when the quantity control provision was deemed unacceptable by USDA. "We think that expansion needs to be stopped, and we thought quantity controls would stop some of that," Widerman said. "We have some questions as to whether it's going to do us that much good now. Promotion will do some good," Widerman observed, "but as long as you have people out there expanding you're not going to get anywhere."

"The marketing order is a compromise order," Pope conceded, pointing out that firm opposition from both the administration and USDA has made any kind of production controls a dead issue. "But I don't like the alternative if we don't get this (marketing order) through," Pope added, pointing out that the number of egg producers nationwide has declined from 12,000 to 2,700 in the last four years. In an interview following the meeting, one other Lancaster

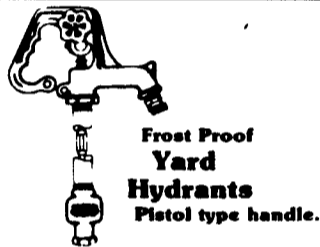
County producer, who requested to remain anonymous, voiced his lack of confidence in a marketing order with no production controls. "If we're going to increase consumption, we're definitely going to increase the price," said the egg producer. "Then you'll have more building and more eggs, so we need some type of control."

But UEP's Al Pope feels there is still much to be gained by adopting the current marketing order. "If we sell more eggs, granted we'll produce more," he said, "but I think we'll produce more profits, too."

Glenn Smith, vice president and general manager for Pennfield Farms' Egg Division agrees. "We'll always have the ability to overproduce," said Smith, who feels that the current marketing order will allow the industry to keep moving forward by creating more demand for eggs. "The basic issue is, would you choose to be part of a growing industry or a declining industry." Smith was recently named one of two state co-captains, acting as a liaison between the marketing order committee and the egg industry.

A producer referendum on the marketing order will probably take place next fall, Pope predicts.

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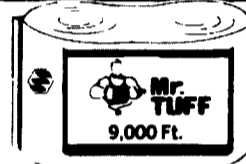
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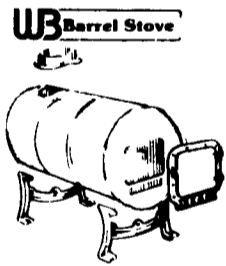


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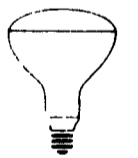
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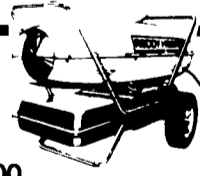
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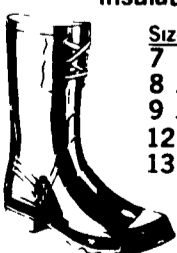
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