

The Dairy Business

By Newton Bair

There is a running argument among farm folks about whether the Federal Government should be involved in Agriculture. Most of the arguments are inspired more by the heat of the controversy than by the light of reason.

Whether we like it or not, Uncle Sam has been looking over our shoulder, setting supports under our pay check, playing banker when money is tight, and pulling gentle strings on many of our actions. And this has been going on for a long time.

We only become conscious of the strings when they begin to tighten and restrict our private decisions. Or when the support begins to sag. Or the easy money for loans begins to tighten up. Then the heat starts to build, and the light of reason is harder to keep shining.

The trouble is, if we do not have some interference and guidance from the government we begin to complain that "they" should do "something." "They" turns out to be the Congress, and "something" is whatever seems to be expedient at the time.

It's never an ideal solution for everyone, and often only a temporary solution that gets more complicated as time goes on. The support price for milk is an ideal example.

If we want to be completely honest, the dairy industry is still the most highly favored of all farm enterprises, because a producer is

guaranteed a price that makes it attractive to milk cows for a living.

If it were not so we wouldn't be faced with the tremendous national surplus of milk. None of the alternatives to dairying are nearly as attractive because they are not as profitable. It is only possible because of the support of the Government.

If the high support price for milk has produced the surplus that the government is now buying, the only solution is to lower the support price (which creates immediate problems for heavily leveraged dairymen), or to attempt some other drastic and highly unpopular system like the herd buyout program.

It is pretty hard to believe that the "Whole herd buyout" program will succeed here in the Northeastern U.S. The results of the bidding and participation in the

program are not published yet, so all we can hope for is that the real trouble spots like the far West and the North Central areas have cooperated to the fullest to reduce their herds.

We don't seem to have as big a surplus here in Pennsylvania, if the competition between dairies for milk and markets is any indication. I only hope that those who have submitted a bid for a whole herd sellout made their bid high enough to cover their expenses for the next five years.

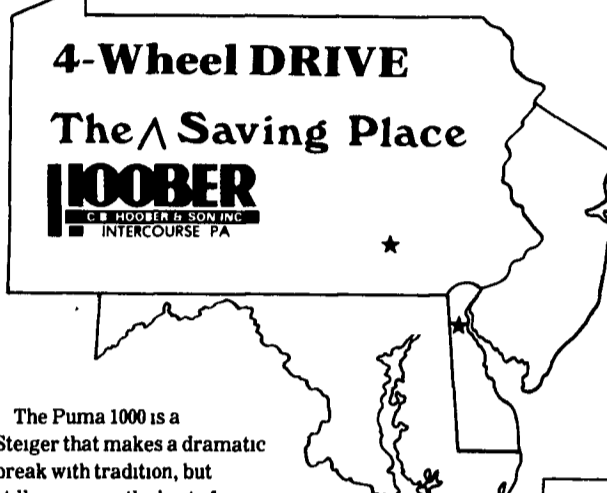
Whether we like it or not, the Federal government will be involved in some way with how we run our business. Despite all the talk about "free markets," meaning no controls on production or prices, I have talked to no one who truly believes that we could operate without some control.

If global markets are the issue, we need the functions of Federal involvement. It's pretty hard to cope with foreign trade as individual producers. Even when we concentrate on our domestic markets there will be some controls, regulations, and supports necessary.

The only alternative to Government involvement in Agriculture as I see it, is complete organization within our own industry. We have too many different farm organizations, espousing too many divergent ideas.

If Agricultural leadership could get together, consolidate their ideas into a workable plan to control our own production, markets, and prices, maybe we could do without government intervention. Until that happens, we'll have to put up with whatever Washington hands us.

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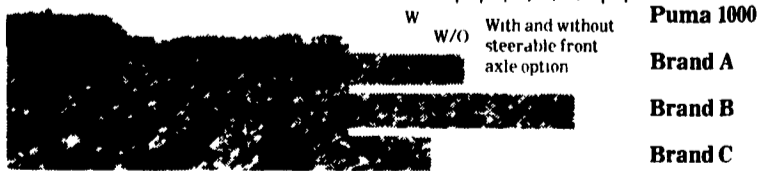
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