



The Dairy Business

By Newton Bair

The Three-Legged Milk Stool

Every now and then a twinge of nostalgia hits, and we recall an old symbol of youth on the farm that relates to some modern problem. For example, a symbol like the old milk stool is very real and quite true to life.

My mother kept the crude three-legged stool that I made for her Christmas present about 1925, and which she jealously guarded as her own private milking aid for many years. Scrubbed and painted, it became a plant stand after she retired from the farm. It's still among the relics taking up space on a shelf in the garage, symbolic of many things.

As a symbol, the three legs offer suitable analogies for some situations facing farmers today. Forget the ancient patina and cow stable aroma that lingers, and notice the solid legs that are of equal length and sturdiness. Maybe the plank that holds them is scuffed and cracked, but it's the legs that make it set solidly, no matter how rough the floor or how often the user must accommodate the movement of the cow. A triangle of support is a symbol of solidity.

Those three legs could be compared to the three structures

that shore up a farm business. Simplified, they are assets, debts, and income. When any one of them gets out of proportion to the others, the main plank gets more and more uncomfortable and downright dangerous. Now you and I both know that these items can't be exactly equal like the legs of a stool. They must be apportioned for equilibrium, making a solid foundation for the business.

Perhaps they are best expressed as ratios, for example, debt service as a percentage of income, calculated by dividing your interest expense by total income.

Another leg could be net profit to investment ratio. Figure this one by subtracting all operating expenses except interest from total sales, and dividing that figure by total assets. The third leg might be sales to fixed assets, which is calculated by dividing your total sales by the value of your depreciated assets. An accountant would call the depreciated value of your assets the book value. Have him help you to calculate your balance.

The moral of this exercise is, if any leg is too long or too short, the stool could send you crashing into the gutter. If the asset's leg is too

MONTROSE - Harold Ely, retired dairy farmer of Montrose

long, chances are that the debt service leg is also too long, and the income leg isn't long enough to keep you sitting solid.

Selling assets and reducing debts may bring the business end down a bit, but too many people think that buying more assets by assuming more debt will make the income leg longer. It can happen, but seldom does. When the stool gets too high to fit under the cow we wonder if it's worth the effort.

We could go on with this kind of allegory. The lowly milk stool might be symbolic of anything that comes in threes, like bad events, lighting three of a match, and "When shall we three meet again?" The three blind mice, the three little pigs or the Three Musketeers need a standard of some kind. Even the many Triptychs and trilogys in art and poetry could have their humble imitator in the three-legged stool. The Holy Trinity hardly relates, although the significance of Three in One can't be overlooked.

Younger readers won't remember the three-legged milk stool. There is the strap-on kind that only has one leg and is meant only to lean on for a few moments. It can never stand alone, since it also relies on a man's two legs for stability. And of course, you don't sit down in the milking parlor at all.

Mama often said that the only reason she enjoyed milking was because she could sit down to do it. It was one of the few occasions that afforded a rest while working! And her personal three-legged stool never slapped a cow over the rump in anger, either. It wouldn't have survived that treatment.

Ely Appointed RCMA Director

has been designated to work with the Steering Committee of the Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency to complete the sign-up of producers in Pennsylvania to the RCMA over order pricing program. He was appointed by the RCMA Board of Directors.

Ely, a former president of the Pennsylvania Association of Farmer Cooperatives and the Pennsylvania Council of Farm Organizations, will work with the various groups involved in the RCMA program. He played a leading role in building a consensus among coops and farm organizations during the successful fight to get a Pennsylvania Producer's Security Fund.

The RCMA Steering Committee is made up of two representatives each from the Pennsylvania Farmers Association, Pennsylvania Grange and Pennsylvania Farmers Union.

"Dairy Farmers urgently need an increase in the farm price of milk," said Ely. "The Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency today represents the only legally based, proven organization that has a reasonable chance to achieve that higher price. We should all give it every support possible."

RCMA is a marketing agency in

common as defined by the federal Capper-Volstead Act. The Act provides for farmers and their organizations to get together to set a price for their products under certain specific guidelines.

RCMA, formed 10 years ago, added 22 million dollars to the milk checks of producers in New England and western New York during an 18-month period. It was subsequently challenged in the courts, and, after 10 years of litigation, was fully vindicated in a U.S. Supreme Court Decision.

RCMA is seeking a sign-up of 95 percent of the dairymen in the 11 Northeastern states. When that has been accomplished, the Agency will review market conditions and set a value for milk at some level above the minimums established under federal and state marketing orders.

Currently, between RCMA and the newly created Middle Atlantic Cooperative Marketing Agency, approximately 85 percent of the sign-up is complete. The push is now on to get the final 10 percent, or more, by mid-November.

Questions about RCMA for which local people cannot provide answers can be addressed to Mr. Ely, RD 1, Montrose. His phone number is: (717) 278-1259.

Golden Harvest Sale Set

ELIZABETHTOWN - The Golden Harvest Sale and Garden Spot Sale, scheduled for Dec. 11, will be held at the Lebanon Fairgrounds.

Previously, the Golden Harvest Sale and Garden Spot Sale were held at the Guernsey Sales Pavilion in Lancaster. But with that building no longer available a new site had to be found.

"We think we've found a good facility," Jay Howes of Backus Associates said. There are three

closed buildings available at the fairgrounds, two barns and a sales area, he added. The facility can handle up to 150 head.

"It's in a good location being situated just off of Route 72, south of Lebanon, and near Lancaster," Howes said.

Selections are currently being made for the sale. Anyone interested in consigning should contact Jay Howes at 717-367-9236 or Mike Weimer at 717-652-3486.

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