

Ag Secretary Wants You To Respond

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan is inviting comments from the dairy industry and the general public regarding the future of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's milk marketing orders, according to Acting Secretary Roland Vautour.

The comment period will run until March 2, 1992, Vautour said.

Federal milk marketing orders regulate the minimum prices paid dairy farmers by handlers of Grade "A" milk in specified geographical areas.

Since they were established under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, milk marketing orders have been modified periodically to keep pace with changes in the structure of the

dairy industry. "Recently, concerns have increased about the cost, efficiency and rationale of milk marketing orders," Madigan said. "Are there more efficient, more competitive ways to give consumers a dependable supply of milk and, at the same time, give dairy farmers a fair return for their product?"

In a separate but related action, USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service announced the preliminary findings of its 43 days of hearings held last year on milk marketing orders. "I am not satisfied that all of the issues were thoroughly aired during the AMS hearings, so I am posing a number of questions to the dairy industry and the general public which are aimed at a more fundamental assessment of milk

marketing orders," Madigan said.

The questions are:
 — Would producers, processors and consumers be better served with less regulation or strengthened regulation under federal milk orders? What would be the impact of less regulation, stronger regulation or no regulation on producers, processors and consumers?

— What institutions have other countries used in milk marketing that shed light on our own system? Are there particular aspects of milk marketing that are carried out more equitably or efficiently in other countries than in the United States?

— Could contractual arrange-

ments between cooperatives and handlers replace some of the functions now performed by the federal order system? If so, which functions?

— If federal orders are changed to impose less regulation, what types of changes should be made? For example, should the following changes be implemented:

- (1) Lowering of minimum Class I differentials.
- (2) Removal of pricing regulations that cause purchasers to pay more under the order for milk brought into a market than would otherwise be necessary to attract the milk to that market.

(3) Establishing the lowest class price under federal orders (usually Class III) equal to the federal support price for milk (instead of the Minnesota-Wisconsin price)?

— If the orders should be strengthened, what specific additional rules are warranted?

— Should the orders be terminated? If so, should this be done immediately or should the orders be phased out over a period of time; and, if so, how much time?

Responses should be sent by March 2, 1992, to the Secretary of Agriculture, Milk Marketing Orders, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

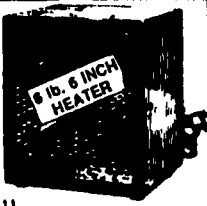
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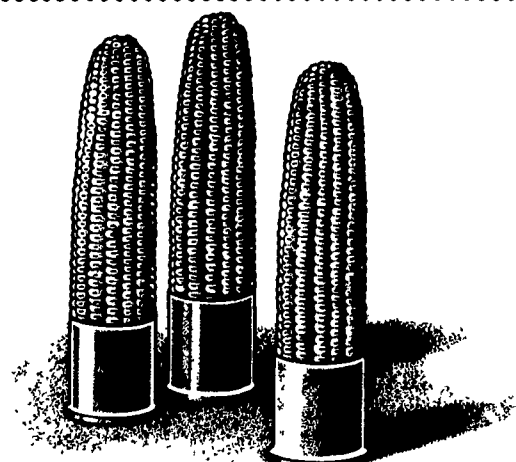
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