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This brings me back to the same question I have seen in farm magazines over the past 12 years — Who really owns the co-ops?

I have always thought that's a simple question and all the co-op owner/members need to do is assert their rights under the co-op by-laws. I now know that's not true in my co-op Land-O-Lakes.

Our representation is not 1 member equal - 1 vote at all levels of governance, when it comes to our board of directors it is by volume of milk shipped.

The new Land-O-Lakes board of directors will reinforce volume has power; California Group 240 members - 3 board members, Midwestern Region 3,300 members - 3 board members, and Mid-Atlantic Region 2,900 members - 3 board members. This is not representation as the co-op by-laws presently state. Which brings me to my next point.

When I asked the Land-O-Lakes administration for a mailing list to discuss the representation problem with other co-op members I was misled, badgered, and out right lied to for 5 days. Once I located the administrator who had the list and the authority to give it to me, he simply said, if you asked me for it today, I'll say no, if you

give me a week I will be able to consider it better, but I don't believe you need to have a meeting. Apparently this administrator has never read the U.S. Constitution or our co-op by-laws which give the right of assembly.

The fastest way to take power from a group of people is to segregate them. Segregation is the denying of a mailing list, which is the thread of communications that binds members separated regionally and nationally, the lack of proper representation, and hindering the right of assembly, these combined actions are called, population resource control management, which was the number one national goal for 70 years of the old Soviet Union.

There will be a meeting of Land-O-Lakes members at the Hoffman Building, Quarryville, PA, Wednesday, February 17, 1999 at 7:30 p.m. to consider a special resolution asking the administration to follow the by-laws of the co-op.

Allen D. Weickel
Peach Bottom

Editor,

The quote (Successful Farming Feb. 1999 p. 45) "This is not about saving the pork industry. It is about saving families. The industry will survive." targets the issue

completely. The 'Pork Powerhouses' celebrated annually by Successful Farming have been following a formulated package to control the industry: Control the product handling and distribution and the great majority of the production and then the price can be fluctuated to eliminate the competition. Andrew Carnegie perfected this technique for industry during the industrial revolution. The poultry industry perfected it for agriculture. As Donna Reifschneider, President of the National Pork Producers Council said, "The poultry industry integrated in 90 days; we are already, in day 50." A pile of farms went down the tubes then. What will happen this time?

Farmers have been chasing the carrot more evenly and predictably than the mule ever did. What other industry gets its suppliers to make large capitol investments "under contract" that do not last any where near the payback period? The author does not have direct experience with pork production contracts though the presumption is they are modeled after poultry: The grower has to provide the investment in facilities with a many year payback to get a contract with the producer that lasts for one growing cycle with only the inference that it will be renewed. At the producers whim they can either delay sending the next batch of animals or cancel. In that event one hopes there is another producer company around to contract with and pay off those buildings. Even if the previous producer decided to renew after all any delay is an interest cost to the farmer that will never be recovered.

The other part of the fairytale is that all the profits in world and domestic markets will be distributed to everyone in the system. We all learned in Econ 101 the profit for a corporation is in keeping costs minimal and profit is returned to the shareholders. The contract farmer, like the independent, is a cost. In the Wal-Marting of America finding the lowest cost irregardless of other consequences is worshiped. The part that may be historically unprecedented is the demonstration of "buy low, sell high." It would be interesting to get accurate data on the number of stocks the packers and big producers own of each other and just how completely they control the market. After all excessive profits in one division make up for losses in another. Do not be fooled by the factory producers complaints of losses as it is only in one division. Overall the big boys are making out just fine and get to watch what is left of the competition wither away to boot.

Milk just recently began trading on the board of trade. This could easily be taken as a first step down

this same path. At the risk of alerting the corporate mega-dairies, Dairymen watch your back or you too will be integrated just as ruthlessly. The grain industry merger is another step, which would give Cargill and ADM 70% of the elevator capacity on the Mississippi which is also the delivery point for the Chicago Board of Trade Soybean Contracts. While the debate has been how much domestic market will be concentrated has anyone looked at global concentration?

The farming tradition has been to produce and let someone else market the product. The percentage taken for that marketing has been steadily increasing in all areas of agriculture. By direct marketing, co-ops, and other means the independents that are going to make it are the ones involved in getting their product to the consumer. The balance will be economic serfs hoping to receive a profit (see Econ 101 above) or will be wiped off the farm landscape.

That is the way I see it.

Doyle Freeman
Cherry Tree, PA

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