

Should Farmers and Labor Unite?

VA UNION of farmers and labor implies that their aims are the same. Many of those who advocate a merger say farmers and labor both strive to improve the economic conditions of their lot; they both draft programs designed to protect their members from aggressors; and they both can put on plenty of political pressure.

If we look at these reasons closely we see that they resemble the main objectives of most any kind of organization. For instance the Bakers' Association want to improve the living standard of their lot and to protect themselves from possible predators, and they also would like to have political influence.

Just how do farmers and labor differ?

In the first place most farmers are employers while labor groups are employees. Farmers are businessmen who operate their own business and so are greatly concerned with management and marketing problems.

Labor doesn't have the same kind of problems and so may not appreciate fully how important farm marketing problems are to the economy of the whole country, not just to farmers.

Farmers want lower wages and higher food prices. Labor wants higher wages and lower food prices. Actually labor has helped put the cost-price squeeze on farmers.

Of all farm costs labor has increased most, mainly because of high factory wages. This forces many a farmer to over-invest in machinery because he must get the farm work done somehow. He really can't afford this machinery, but it is cheaper than hiring labor. As a result his income shrinks while his city cousin's income increases.

Then labor goes on strike and usually gets a raise in pay which means the things farmers must buy cost more. This raise in pay actually comes out of farmer pockets—and farmers don't have a thing to say about it.

Rail strikes upped freight rates and eastern farmers had to pay more for livestock feed which had to come from western Canada.

When workers in the Okanagan Valley fruit factories went on strike, the growers had to pack and process their own fruit the best way they could. These growers not only paid the factory workers' raise, but also took a loss on their produce while the raise was being worked out.

If farmers and labor have the same aims why do farmers usually get stuck with the bill when labor wants to live higher?

Some people may feel such situations would be avoided if farmers and labor united. I think most rural people will agree that it's not the nature of farmers to be as aggressive as labor. A merger would likely put farmers in a subordinate position where they may not have any say at all. As a separate organization farmers can approach anybody on equal ground.

However good public relations with labor might help a lot. When labor Jack knows farmer Jake, realizes what a good fellow Jake is and knows something of Jake's problems, Jack might be less inclined to step on Jake's toes, or vice-versa. ✓ * * *

New Cheese Program

AT their annual meeting last month the Ontario Cheese Producers said their two-price marketing system had served its purpose. They believe any future surplus can be disposed of easily in Britain by spending a little advertising money. So what kind of a marketing system are they going to use now?

Some producers have been complaining that the domestic marketing set-up was leaving them with the prickly end of the stick. As a result the Farm Products Marketing Board suggested some changes, which they accepted.

Basically the Board recommended that negotiating for minimum prices be dropped and that producers be permitted to market any of the cheese, not just the surplus.

The Board says the plan will have

this effect:

- Export in any volume will be possible only if the overseas price is as good as the domestic price. It assumes that all the cheese presently being produced can all be eaten in Canada.
- If not and if the overseas market is not so good, then it will mean cutting production to fit domestic consumption.
- The plan should get better buying competition and will allow buyers to buy what they want without getting stuck with some poor stuff. Also factories that produce top quality cheese will get paid for it.
- As a result the quality of our cheese should improve which automatically improves its marketing prospects.

How will they arrive at a price if price negotiating is dropped?

They're going to try the "Dutch Clock System of Auction" . . . sell cheese by the clock. You've probably heard of the "calf clock" in operation at the Toronto stock yards. Well this is much the same idea. Instead of starting at the minimum price, or bottom and working up, buyers will start at a price higher than current market prices and work down.

Instead of an auctioneer this system uses an electric clock controlled by push buttons which the buyers operate. The clock dial is divided into different prices. When the product is offered the clock is set at the high price. The hand moves downward until a buyer pushes the button which stops the clock. The price and buyer's number shows up on the clock.

No two people can push the button at the same time and a buyer has only one chance. However, the seller can take the product home and try again tomorrow if he isn't satisfied with the price he got.

Certain regulations govern the kind and condition of cheeses that may be offered at these auctions. A catalogue giving details of kind of cheeses and location of the sale are sent to buying establishments several days before the sale.

Results of this plan should be interesting. ▲▲▲