## Agriculture Update

# Beef industry is in decline

The picture emerging from the \$1.7 million Beef Industry Marketing Task Force report is one of an industry in decline.

Beef is still the largest sector of the agricultural industry in the province, but the current herd is smaller than at any time this century.

Since 1971, the number of farms registering cattle has fallen from 64,295 to 39,647 and a total herd of three million head is now about 2.4 million.

Much of the decline in numbers can be attributed to increased productivity, particularly in the dairy sector where per cow milk yields have risen dramatically - but beef consumption has fallen.

Since 1976, when an average of 51.5 kilograms per capita was being consumed, beef has been going out of fashion. In 1987 the average Canadian was eating only 38.15 kg - 15 kg less than in 1976.

Poultry has become more popular in a society in which more women work out of the home and more energy is spent on health concerns.

Society as a whole is spending less of its income on food -- and considerably less on beef. In 1969, about 11.8 per cent of total expenditure on food went towards buying beef. By 1984 that was down to 7.8 per cent.

Finally, the spread between retail

and wholesale prices has widened. The general decline in consumption and the fall in the amount of money being spent on food are bad enough -- what has made matters worse for the farmer has been a decline in the producer's share of the consumer's dollar.

Add to that increased feed costs and it is easy to understand why so many producers have been squeezed out, and so many of those still in the market find it difficult to cover their costs of production.

The size of the average beef operation has also changed with a decline in the number of farms herding in the middle range: in 1971 almost half the cattle in the pro-

#### OFA forms new council

The province's livestock associations and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture have formed a Farm Animal Council.

Its annual budget is near \$100,000.

The organization was formed "to protect agriculture from the legislative actions of animal rights groups."

Among the activities in which the council will engage are the preparation of classroom materials to be distributed to schools.

vince were in herds between 33 and 77 head.

Today, it is the largest farms which account for more than 60 per cent of the beef cattle in Ontario.

At the same time, the number of

beef operations where the farmer is spending the bulk of his time working off the farm has increased. As the task force puts it: "The Ontario cattle industry represents the major part time agricultural activity in the province."

J. & S.

According to Ontario's farm accounting\* project, cow-calf operators tend to have high degrees of equity -- an average of more than 80 per cent -- and it is this which has allowed them to sustain low returns over the years.



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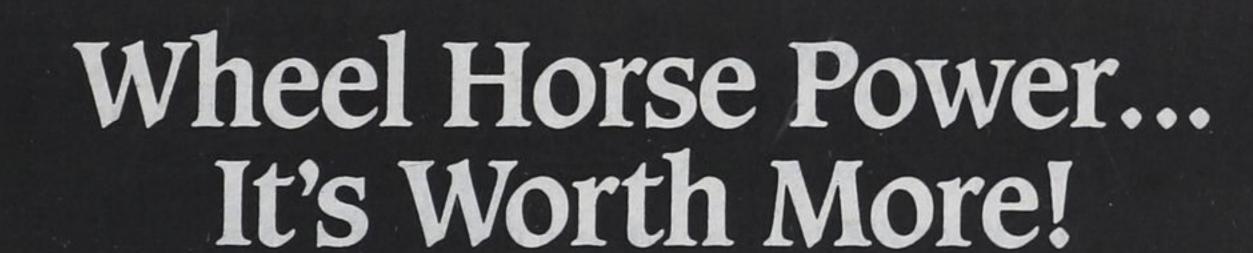
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