

Free enterprise beef men must take bad with good

BY BILL WOLFE

on the farm front

Beef farmers call themselves free enterprisers operating in a world-wide supply and demand market. Realizing the cyclical nature of our industry, we have to take the bad years with the good.

Over the years, the industry has been good to most of us, but we must keep in mind the effect of our improved net worth.

I am concerned about several factors confusing our supply-demand system: the Nixon price freeze with resulting border closing, the present Ford beef import quotas and the dumping

of Oceanic beef on our market.

There are also the federal stabilization payments on slaughter cattle. Are feeders paying more for stockers expecting a payment? We don't know what the 1976 stabilization level is. Why not?

If feeders ever needed a payment it's this year, but will payments go equitably to those who suffered the greatest losses from selling on lower markets?

Then there's the provincial Cow-Calf Stabilization Plan. Are

producers keeping cows another year simply to receive a payment?

That's potentially disruptive but most cow-calf producers need payments.

Incentive programs will eventually lead to supply management — unless the U.S. is willing to take all our surplus beef. The beef industry isn't ready for supply management yet — mainly because no one can comprehend how it would operate successfully and, of course, because we are free enterprisers.

But I am not saying that supply management would not work for our beef business. Indeed, some producers insist that it would.

If we could find a meaningful stabilization or income insurance plan, applicable at non-incentive levels, we would all be happy.

For now, the least disruptive support to our system would be after the fact, stop-gap payments to producers who had suffered heavy losses.

We need a realistic federal meat import law. We are the only beef importing country without such a law.

What about our marketing system for slaughter cattle? Many farmers would like to make changes.

The farmers who sell effectively direct to packing plants are living off the backs of their neighbours who pay commissions to sell their

cattle through public auction markets — where everyone's price is set.

Should all slaughter cattle be sold through public auctions, especially if we had an effective carcass settlement auction introduced?

Would we have a fairer price if all packing plants competed for all the cattle?

Some farmers suggest a teletype auction system similar to the hog program. Can you see cattle being offered for sale without ever leaving your feed lot?

A successful TV feeder cattle auction was held recently in Billings, Montana, where 14,000 feeder cattle were offered for sale in a few hours.

The cattle were still on the ranches where they had been filmed.

The buyers, assembled in one auction ring, viewed motion pictures of the cattle on large TV screens. The owner or his agent described the cattle and conditions of sale and

the owner was given the last bid.

We need improvements in our beef industry, but let's not make hasty changes under the economic and emotional heat of a period of severe losses.

Let's have maximum farmer involvement in the planning of any government programs.

And let's make our changes through our democratically run County Cattlemen's Associations. Get out and join your local beef association.

If you're not involved, at least on the ground level, have you any right to complain?

As in the past, OFA is usually willing to support the OCA.

Ready? Get set

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— Don't press on. If it gets to be tough going, turn back or seek refuge.

— Try to keep to main roads.

— Make sure you have ample gasoline.

— Don't be foolhardy.

— Keep your radio tuned to a local station for weather advice.

If You're Trapped

— Avoid over-exertion and exposure. Shovelling and bitter cold can kill.

— Stay in your car. You won't get lost and you'll have shelter.

— Keep fresh air in your car. Open a lee side window.

— Run your motor sparingly. Beware of exhaust fumes.

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Marylo Graham

Marylo Graham.



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