

Mainstream Canada -

# Meanwhile down on the farm

by W. ROGER WORTH

Even at the finest of cocktail parties, it's hard to miss the city slicker complaining about the rapidly rising cost of food.

"The problem is farmers," says the bank executive's wife. "They're able to go south (or to Hawaii) in winter, buy snowmobiles and speedboats,

and I hear they now have air-conditioned tractors. Guess who pays the bill."

The senior bureaucrat concurs. The problem, of course,

is that the basic complaint is a myth: the price of food grown and raised by the nation's farmers has not risen dramatically, even though producers have been forced to pay high interest rates to help out the banks, and high taxes to support such items as bureaucratic salaries.

So much for city slicker attitudes.

What's really been happening down on the farm lately is not unlike what's been happening for years. In spring, farmers tilled the land and borrowed money to plant crops. Over the summer they've sprayed, irrigated and tended the delicate plants, at the same time spending sleepless nights worrying about too much sun, too much rain and the myriad list of diseases with complicated names that can completely destroy their efforts. This fall they'll worry about a chilling (and killing) early frost, and, most important, the unknown price they'll get for their product.

It's not a game for the

fainthearted.

Hazards in the farming business are unlike those in virtually any other endeavour. Profits can be huge, but they're more likely to be reasonable, non-existent, or, in bad years, farmers have to contend with massive losses to compensate them for their time and trouble.

It's true, all smaller businesses face problems related to high interest rates, inflation, government red tape and high taxes. But while some firms depend to a greater or lesser degree on the weather, food producers are totally dependent on that great unknown.

The wonder is that, given all the constraints, Canada's food production system works at all! But it does, to the advantage of all.

The evidence? Here are two simple facts:

- Canadians pay about 22 per cent of take-home pay on food, compared with 30 per cent in West Germany and more than 35 per cent in Japan.

- Canada is a major food exporter. Unlike food-poor nations, we're

not about to run short.

It's natural, perhaps, for Canadian consumers to complain about marketing boards, Crowsnest Pass transportation subsidies and other farm-related support programs. After all, the infighting on these and other issues, even among fiercely independent, outspoken and

strong-willed farmers, is widely publicized.

But no matter their differences, either with governments, consumers or among themselves, this irreplaceable group continues to do the farming job as well or better than anyone in the world. And that's a distinction we sometimes fail to understand.

# Contact lens scare story untrue

In a recent publication of "Safety Canada", published by Canada Safety Council, it was stated that there is no truth to recent reports that contact lenses contributed to permanent blindness for workers exposed briefly to strong electrical arcs or sparks.

The Canadian Association of Optometrists has compiled authoritative evidence showing that the incidents never happened. Even if they had, there could be no physiological basis for the alleged damage to occur.

Speaking at a symposium on occupational vision in Edmonton on April 9th, Dr. Tony Cullen, a research scientist and Professor of Optometry from the University of Waterloo, said it was a myth that contact lenses could be "welded" to the cornea by flashes from welding arcs or electrical sparks, causing removal of the cornea when the contact lens was taken out. Dr. Cullen said that this process "cannot occur without a violation of a fundamental principle of optics. Heat generated in the contact lens is dissipated ... therefore the residual heat absorbed by the corneal epithelium is less than if no contact lens were worn."

Although all previous reported incidents are untrue, the Canadian Association of Optometrists warns that tinted eye safety protectors still must be worn for welding, because exposure to this type of hazard can cause photokeratitis, or a burning of the cornea. Caused by ultra-violet rays, it is

painless at first but leads to a temporary feeling of a foreign body in the eyes, redness, extreme pain, sensitivity to light and excessive tears. This condition occurs whether contact lenses are worn or not.

The Canadian Assoc. of Optometrists is concerned about the general restriction of contact lens wear in the workplace. Worker's Compensation Board regulations restrict use of contact lenses in unsafe chemical or dusty environments, it is not always easy to determine when the situation is clearly unsafe. In fact, workers may often be better off with contact lenses, as they may prevent or diminish injury by shielding the eye or absorbing certain

harmful agents. (The lenses should be removed immediately in the latter case).

There are also many instances where contact lenses improve vision to a degree that spectacles cannot, and situations where switching daily to prescription safety spectacles would cause unacceptable visual difficulties.

Contact lenses, therefore, do not replace safety glasses, but in many cases can be used as long as "plain" safety eyewear is worn when necessary. It is also wise for all contact lens wearers to have a pair of prescription safety glasses as a back-up in case their contacts are lost, damaged or not permitted in a certain area.

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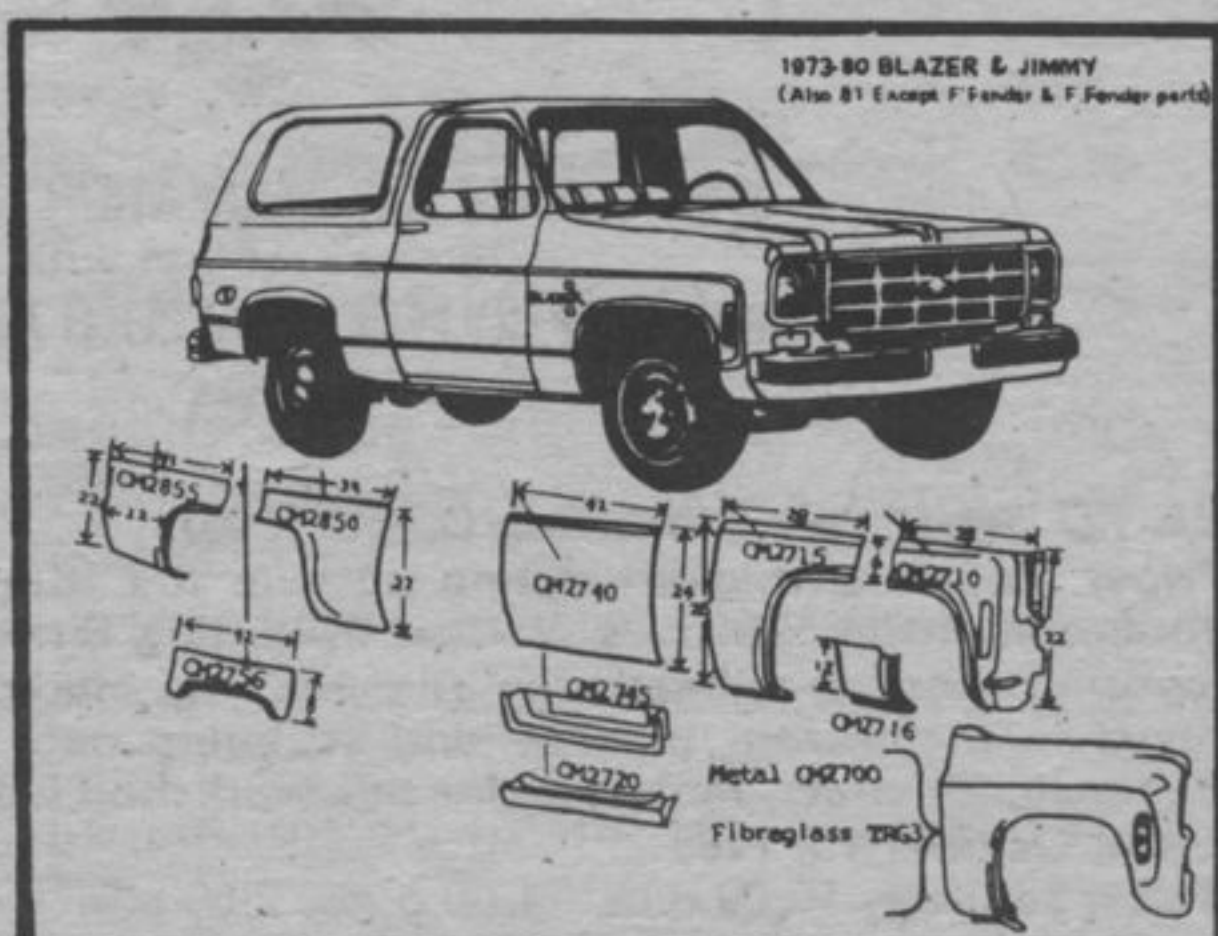
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GARY GUSUL

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