

By J.J. Inskeep

NOTES BY THE WAYSIDE

Louie our hunting and fishing partner and rural philosopher from out Molalla way had just finished corn planting as we drove up shortly after eleven thirty. This is a good hour to arrive at Louie's ranch. His hawk-eyed wife who doesn't like visitors who distract Louie from his work, us in particular, is always in the kitchen at that time or in town spending Louie's hard earned money. In the first instance we visit briefly and "git down the road". But when .. "she", as Louie calls her, is away from home Louie always invites us to lunch. One thing we can say for Louie's wife .. she is a good cook.

"Just in time for lunch" was Louie's way of greeting.

"I sure am glad to get this field of Oregon 355 corn planted before the next rain. I have been trying some of the new varieties furnished by Clive Cook but we haven't yet found any that beats old 355 field corn hybrid."

Luncheon over we filled up with some of Louie's "Old Hillside" smoking tobacco, lit em' up and visited. Mostly about the recession.

"Darndest recession I ever saw" Louie remarked. "Usually when we have a recession prices of essentials such as steel decline, same for labor. But not this time. Costs are going up but fast .. and so are bank deposits. This recession is not caused by lack of money to my way of thinking. My boy, we are experiencing

a buyers strike against high prices by housewives. And don't think they don't wield a lot of influence.

"But I am concerned with their attitude toward meat prices and beef producers in particular. In fact I think a lot about these matters while I drive the tractor. I hear the Los Angeles have even started a boycott of sorts.

"The way I look at it is this. Prices of meat on the hoof go up and down with supply and demand. About 1951 good steers brought as much as 38 cents a pound on the hoof. These were high prices and everybody got into the business. It wasn't long after that a good steer grading choice sold for as little as 19 cents a pound. This was below the production costs of many producers so they got out of the business. This meant fewer cattle with packers bidding higher prices. In fact prices are back up to 29 cents on the hoof. That is where we are now.

"The way it appears to me is that folks are kicking about beef prices but their take home pay is at an all time high. It doesn't make sense except for one thing .. processing costs have risen sharply during the past few years. Labor, materials, and transportation costs are at an all time high and these are all reflected in retail prices. The irony of the situation is that consumers pay little attention to these processing costs and place the blame for higher prices on the producer.

"Cattle prices will likely fall as more cattle appear on the market but you just can't turn a crank and obtain more cattle. A cow has only one calf a year. The processes of nature are sometimes slow. Too many get out of the business and it will take time for someone else to fill the gap.

"Here is what one of the farm editors has to say about present prices:"

"Apparently a great many frills have been added for the convenience of the housewife and, instead of making more and more progress in efficiency, many added costs have gone into food distribution.

"Using prices of cattle and beef in 1947 and 1957 as an example, U. S. Department of Agriculture statisticians show that the net farm value of the cattle for the latter year was lower on the farm, yet the consumer paid higher prices. In 1947, the average price of all choice beef at retail in the United States was 61.8 cents lbs., the average net farm value 44.2 cents, resulting in the man in the country getting 72 percent of the consumer dollar. In 1957, choice beef averaged 70.6 cents lb. at retail, netted the farmer only 42.4 cents, giving the man in the country only 60 percent of the consumer dollar.

"Thus the farmer, cattleman or feeder received only 60 percent of the consumer dollar in 1957 against 72 percent in 1947. In the case of pork, the percentage to the farmer in 1947 was 71 percent of the consumer dollar, only 55 percent in 1957.

"No one claims that the retailer is getting rich because he appears to be getting such an increased share of the consumer dollar. Retailers justly

say that, if there were great profits to be made in retail meat sales, competition would bring others into the business and that in itself would prevent unduly large profits. The gross profit isn't entirely in the retail phase. From the time animals leave the farm or feedlot, there are many hands to go through before the meat reaches the consumer.

"Transportation, slaughtering, processing and retailing have been hit by higher wages, higher taxes and higher costs of doing business. These costs are more likely to continue to increase rather than decrease."

"All of which is another way of saying" Louie concluded, "After beef prices hit the peak and start to slide as we expect this summer, I doubt that these processing costs won't go down a cent. In fact they may continue to rise. Well, I guess its time to get back to work."

The following article concerning Oregon's attempt to control hayfever ragweed can be looked upon with unusual interest on the part of Oregon citizens. It is of especial interest to those of us in Clackamas County because, in this state, the hay fever ragweed was first identified in Clackamas County ten years or so ago. Continued on page 3

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