

Million Cows 'Not Paying Their Way'

By OVID A. MARTIN
Associated Press Farm Reporter
WASHINGTON (AP) — Government experts say there are at least one million dairy cows that are "free boarders" on the farms that keep them.
That is, they do not produce enough milk to pay their way. Their owners are shelling out for the privilege of keeping them, whether they realize it or not.
But that's the least of the unfavorable things that can be said about these cows. They are, without doubt, at the root of the dairy problem — a problem that has been the subject of bitter debate in and out of Congress. It has been a problem that has influenced many elections and could play a major role in this year's national voting.
There are about 22 million dairy cows on the nation's farms. Agriculture Department dairy experts say fully one million of these produce less than 5,000 pounds of milk a year each. They say a dairyman hasn't much chance to make any money off his cows unless they average at least 6,000 pounds.

It wouldn't be so bad if the owners of the low-producing cows were the only ones hurt.

Add to Surplus
As it is, the 22 million cows are expected to produce about 127 billion pounds of milk this year. That is expected to be five billion pounds more than consumers will buy in the form of fluid milk, butter, cheese, ice cream, and other dairy products.

This extra or surplus five billion pounds depresses the price for all the milk produced — not just the price of the unneeded supply. This surplus milk is diverted into butter, cheese, and dried milk and sold to the government under a dairy price support program. The accumulation of these stocks in the hands of the government serves to depress prices of all milk and dairy products as long as they exist.

Now here is where the one million boarder cows fit into the picture. They produce the equivalent of the surplus supply — a production which takes money out of their owners' pockets rather than puts it in.

If these cows could be culled from herds at once, the surplus supply would disappear and dairy prices would improve, the experts say.

Culling Needed
In the view of Dr. J. Frank Kendrick, head of the department's dairy herd improvement and sire-proving section, a solution to the problem of low returns is to be found in culling rather than in legislative programs affecting dairy price supports and surplus "give-away" programs.

Why do farmers keep unprofitable cows? The experts say that for the most part, it is a lack of realization that such cows do not pay for their keep.

But for the dairy farmers as a whole, there has been a marked improvement in their herds in recent years. And there is room for much more improvement.

Milk production this year is expected to average 6,000 pounds a cow. Twenty-five years ago, the average was only 4,500 pounds. It has climbed from 3,000 to 6,000 pounds since 1947.

But some idea as to the possibilities may be obtained from the fact that a few cows have produced as much as 25,000 pounds a year. About one and one-half million dairy cows in dairy improvement herds in this country produced an average of 9,363 pounds last year or 57 per cent more than this year's prospective average level.

Only 14 Million

It would require only about 14 million — instead of the present herd of 22 million — to produce the nation's milk and dairy product requirements this year if such a herd produced the average of those in present improvement herds.

While Wisconsin is generally looked upon as the No. 1 dairy state, several others rank ahead of it in the average production of their dairy cows. The California average last year was 8,530 pounds. New Jersey was second with 7,800. Rhode Island third with 7,600. Arizona fourth with 7,500 and Wisconsin fifth with 7,150.

Louisiana trailed with the low average of 2,670 pounds. Generally speaking, production averages were lowest in Southern states, where the dairy industry has only recently begun to take hold.

Dr. Kendrick says a number of factors have contributed to the production of more and more milk with fewer and fewer cows. He said they include herd improvement efforts of various agencies, including the Agriculture Department and state agricultural colleges.

Through use of artificial insemination, more and more dairy farmers have been able to get the benefits of proved sires in breeding better producing cows.

Another factor, he said, has been the development, through the department's "grasslands" program, of better grass and forage feed for dairy cows.

Economic factors, too, have contributed, Kendrick said, to the improvement. Often dairymen have found it necessary to step up their volume of production to offset declines in milk prices in order to maintain a desired level of income.

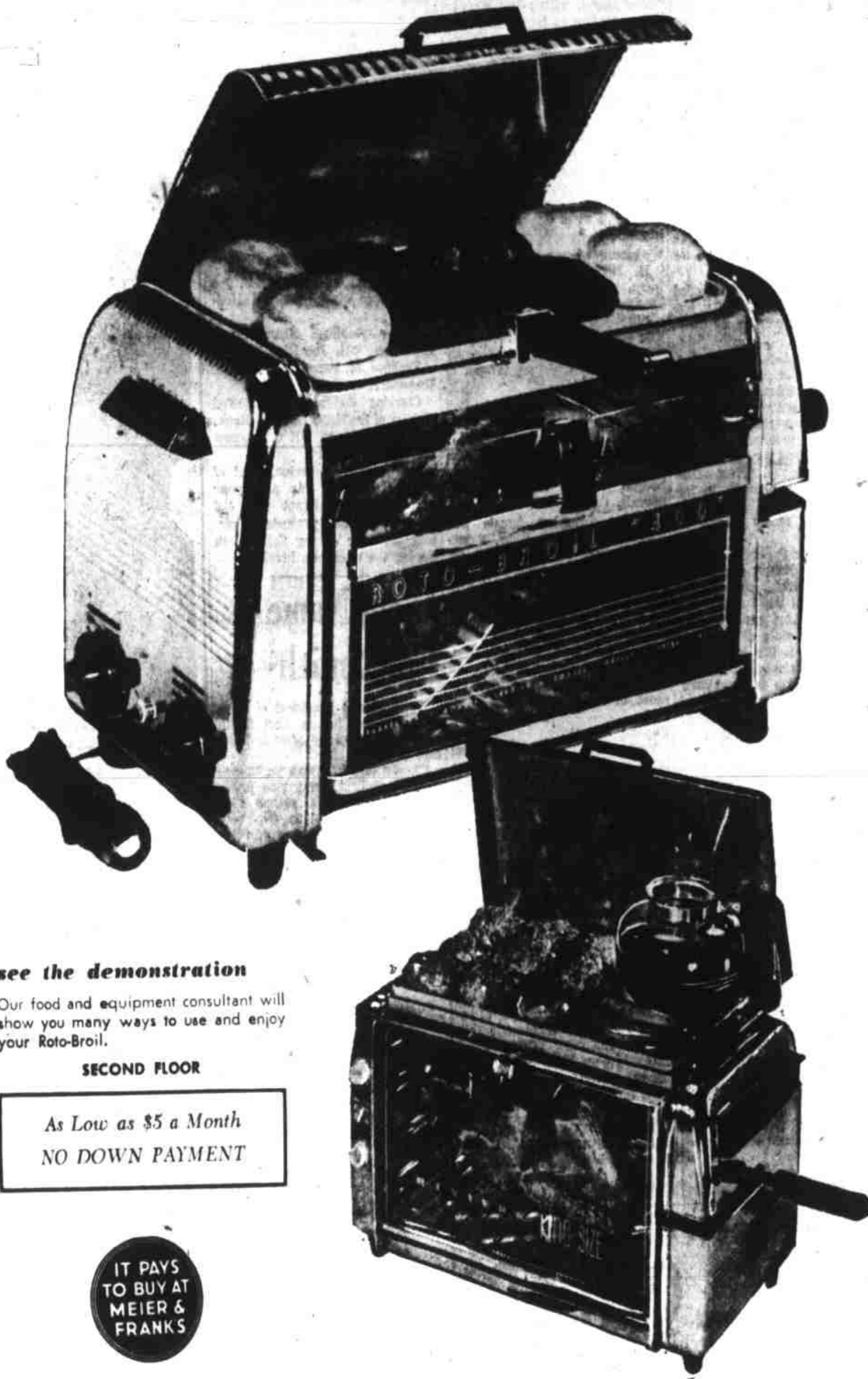
RED LIGHTS TO CHANGE

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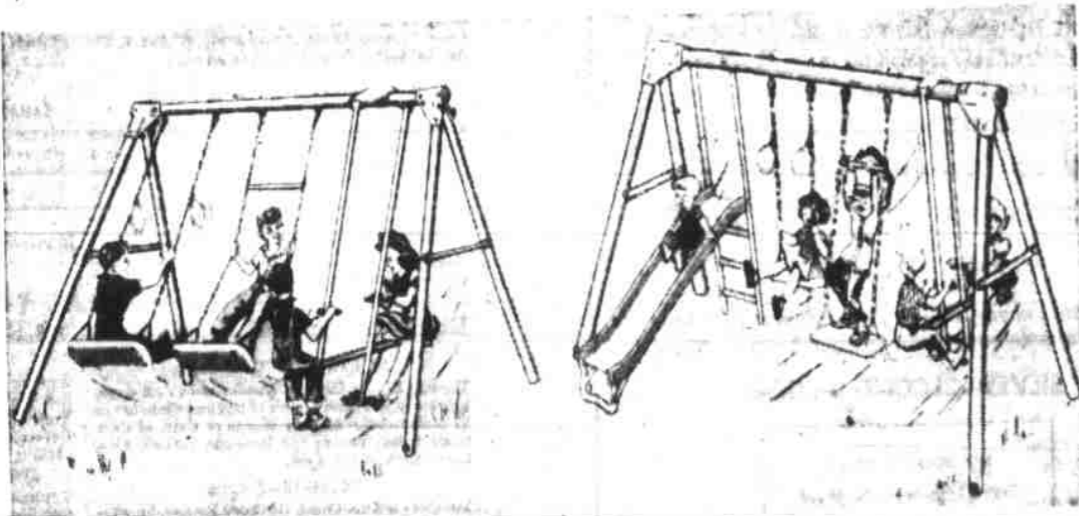
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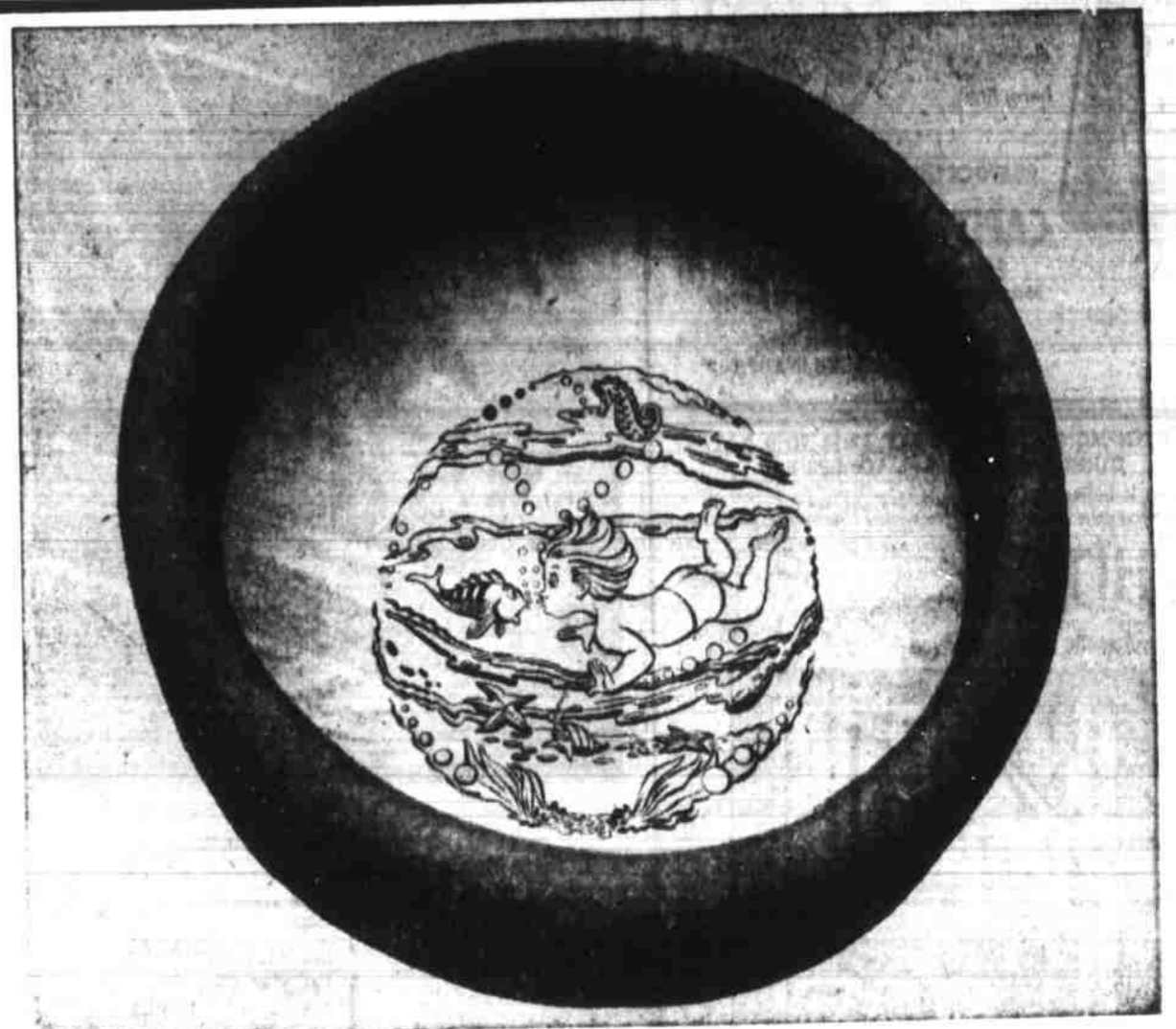
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