

Beefing About Beef

Meeting The Meat Crisis

By MARGARET MILLER

middleman and everyone feels caught in the middle.

Mrs. Lenore Mendelson of Farmington put it succinctly as spokesman for the actively boycotting Families United Against Inflation. (That's FUAI for short, and you pronounce it "Phooey.")

"We're families getting together to show distaste with what's going on," she said. "We feel we've been taken advantage of, and we don't like it."

"We are in sympathy with the supermarket people and with the farmer, but we feel there's someone in the middle who is cleaning up."

An informal check in this area indicated the price spreads from the 40 cents a pound which a Plymouth Township farmer lists as his best recent on - the - hoof price to 93 cents a pound, the current price of a side of beef in one Farmington butcher shop, to well over \$2 a pound for top grade steaks.

The FUAI group, which began with the neighbors on Glenmoor Avenue in Farmington and claims support of more than 1,000 families in Oakland County, staged a march to a nearby supermarket Sunday as the boycott began.

They took along a couple of horses wearing "Don't Eat Me" signs, but the animals balked at going into the supermarket parking lot.

FUAI, according to Mrs. Mendelson, Mrs. Cherie La-tona and Mrs. Jan Wittenbach, is going to keep up the boycott "until prices drop to a reasonable level" and will keep its members supplied with meatless recipes to use.

"We're going to watch prices carefully and will make endorsements of stores that offer better values," Mrs. Mendelson said.

Definitely ready to join any boycott is Mrs. Peggy White of Plymouth.

"I spent a whole day shopping last week," she said. "And the meat I could afford is stuff I'd wouldn't feed my dog."

"Our food expenses used to be 40 to 49 per cent of our budget. Now they are way over 50 per cent."

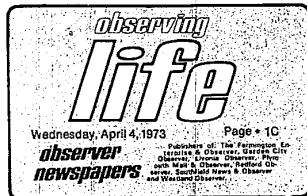
Mrs. White, wife of a Ford glass cutter and mother of two small children, said she's planning a garden this summer and "don't laugh, I'm looking into getting a calf to raise."

That won't help says Columbus Wilkin, who has been raising beef cattle in Plymouth township since the 1930s.

He and his son, Dwight, maintain emphatically that the higher beef dollar is not going to the farmer.

"The way we look at it," Wilkin said, "meat prices aren't out of line with other prices."

"Because wages have gone up so much, the cost of feed and the cost of replacing farm equipment is far higher. That means that with all we have to do, we're lucky if we earn 10 cents an hour, and if a small farmer can clear \$4,500 to \$5,000 a year, he's sailing."



"Taxes are up, and we pay for everything like everyone else."

Wilkin figures his investment in a steer he has raised is about \$400, and there's another \$100 charge for butchering it.

"So in the last few years I've sold the meat we raise -- and you take what they give you for it -- and we buy meat for the table. Right now I can't touch anything but chuck steak."

Boycotting isn't the answer, insists Wilkin.

The National Farmers Organization has recommended that we hold meat back," he said. "But how can that help? If we have 15 to 20 steer ready to market, we have to move them because it costs so much to keep feeding them."

"If the boycott goes on, a lot of farmers will just not stay in business. Then there will be less meat on the market, and the price will go still higher."

From restaurateur Jerry Harb of Plymouth came another view of the meat price squeeze.

It hit him in the process of converting Harb's restaurant from a pizzeria-type dining place to a more specialized, moderately priced establishment.

"In the five months since the change, food prices have risen as much as 40 per cent in specific areas," he said, adding that even now menu printing is difficult because "any menu becomes obsolete in a couple of weeks."

He outlined several choices for the restaurant owner -- anticipating higher prices in menu listings, making portions smaller, raising the price of less expensive items in order to even things out.

"Those are all unacceptable," he said, "but I suppose I'll have to do a little of all and rely on customers' awareness of constantly increasing prices."

From each vantage point, the meat price ceiling decreed by President Nixon last week seemed to offer little or no help.

Lenore Mendelson. "He's done more harm than good. The price was frozen so high that when the ceiling comes off, prices will just zoom up again."

"The ceiling should have been imposed in December or January, or else prices should have been rolled back to that time."

First reports on Observ-erland observance of the boycott indicated meat was still being purchased, but there were suggestions that some fall-off could be expected as the boycott week progressed.

Meat sales over the week-end were down \$2,000 in the Wrigley supermarket at Orchard Lake Road and 13 Mile, said manager David Leister, but chicken and fish were a sellout.



Vanishing American?

"We're keeping it light," he said of orders for the week.

However, not much difference was noted in the Chatham supermarket at Merri-man and Five Mile in Livonia and the Farmer Jack's at Merriman and Ann Arbor Trail in Westland.

"Saturday was a good day," reported Don Norton, meat department manager in

the Chatham store. "In talking to people, I had the feeling they were buying extra in anticipation of the boycott. I've ordered normally for this week, but I'm watching it closely."

A Farmington meat market owner agreed that people were preparing ahead.

Even with the price of sides 93 cents a pound, he reported a brisker - than - usual trade in the last week.



BEEF ON THE HOOF doesn't mean much profit for farmer Columbus Wilkin of Plymouth. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring)

m. m. memos

The current furor over meat prices keeps reminding me of another era, when buying meat was much in our minds--those days of rationing during World War II.

At that point in time, I admit, I had little to do with meat other than to eat it.

But I well remember my mother carefully checking the family ration books to see how many of the red points needed to purchase beef, pork or lamb were available.

Then she had to check the meat counter--only one store then because gas was rationed too--and try to find some meat worth the surrender of those precious ration coupons.

I remember she commented that after figuring out the ration points and working one's way through the crowd of shoppers it seemed almost unfair to have to pay money, too.

And recollections about meat rationing also lead me to one of my favorite quotations, taken from a series of spoonerisms called "Asop's Feebles" and printed in a magazine the author referred to as "The Paterday Evening Post."

This fable was about "The Shog and his Da-dow," and it ended with the following "Storal to the mory:"

"Even if they won't give you enough papping wrapper to map your wreat in, you can thank your sticky lars you had enough ped points to bife the bee in the pirst flace."

Maybe in these days of wry-skeoteking preat mices, we should try a return to ped points.

—Margaret Miller



PEGGY WHITE of Plymouth will stick with meatless shopping tours for a while (Observer photo by Bob Woodring.)



FARMINGTON FAMILIES joined in a march to a supermarket to mark the beginning of their meat boycott. (Photo by Fran Evert)

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