

LOOKING AT WASHINGTON

By Hugo S. Sims, Washington Correspondent

Hits At Middlemen. Fulmer's Investigation Let's Get All The Facts.

Resolution introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman H. P. Fulmer, chairman of the committee on Agriculture, to inquire into the feasibility of establishing a farm-to-market system in rural areas through local, state and national agencies, under a farm-to-market program that would provide facilities for proper grading and marketing, storage and other essential services, may have something to spread between what the farmer gets for his products and what the consumer pays for it is enormous. Her the spread is due to monopoly control of markets, "conspiracies" in regard to buying, or other manipulations of the middleman is own. As a matter of fact, no one knows whether the spread is reasonable, on the basis of the rendered, or not.

For a publication of fifteen rail-labor unions, says that in 1922 a report of independent research work made a two-year study of the distribution system. This revealed a farm crop for which farmers received a little less than \$9,000,000, cost the consumer a little more than \$27,000,000 or a 200 per cent "mark up".

It seems like an enormous increase. The purpose of the Fulmer investigation, we take it, is to establish whether such a spread exists at present time and to ascertain the reasons rendered by so-called middlemen in return for the money they give. This is an entirely justifiable investigation and, if pursued in intelligent and objective manner, it should do the nation some benefit.

Mr. Fulmer does not strengthen his case, however, when he makes such statements as: "Farmers and consumers are hopeless and helpless because there are just too many middlemen rating between them." Considering the fact that the number of middlemen in relation to the number of farmers and consumers is small, this doesn't make sense.

There never has been a law to prevent farmers from performing the services that are now performed by the middlemen. There never has been a time, since Mr. Fulmer entered the House many years ago, when an investigation could not have been attempted. Certainly, farmers and consumers, plus their "friends" in Congress, could have curbed the rapaciousness of middlemen, if such there be, many years ago.

There is nothing to be gained by abusing middlemen. They perform a useful economic service, both to farmers and consumers. Whether they perform the service at an equitable price is a matter to be determined by an investigation. There is nothing to be gained by comparing the price of any crop in the field and the price at which the crop is sold in a city unless one understands the machinery by which the crop is bought, handled, processed, transported and sold.

To declare that "many middlemen never produce a living thing, but operate more or less as parasites, sapping the very lifeblood of producers and consumers" is oratorical and may influence unthinking farmers and consumers but it does not get us anywhere. Every sensible economist knows that some middlemen perform worthwhile services to society that is every bit as valuable as that performed, let us say, by a Congressman, who gets \$10,000 a year, without producing a living thing except words and votes.

We hope that Congressman Fulmer will get his resolution passed and that a real investigation will result, not for the purpose of condemning the functions of middlemen but to see just what they do in return for what they get. When the facts have been

revealed, by a clear and impartial study, the time will be at hand to determine whether some legislation should result.

No man can begin an investigation of an economic set-up, with any claim to justice, if he starts with his mind made up. We hold no brief to defend middlemen, but the facts should be available before we denounce them. In many cases, we have no doubt, the services of middlemen are valuable and worth what they receive; in other cases, due to peculiar circumstances, the reverse will be true. The purpose of an inquiry should be to discover the truth in particular instances and to apply proper remedies to relieve unjust and inequitable conditions.

Adjectives Not Enough. Report Not Specific.

Why Not Call The Names?

We think it is very important for Congress to investigate the action of Government officials and to keep itself thoroughly informed as to the progress of the war effort.

For this purpose, it is necessary for the Congress to have a number of committees which will inquire into actual conditions and, after securing information, pass it on to the legislative bodies.

When a Congressional committee reports a situation that needs correction, it is incumbent upon the committee to present the facts and to suggest proper remedies for the condition revealed. It is not enough for a committee of investigation to hand in a report, teeming with adjectives that do not take the place of facts.

In this connection, we call attention to a recent report of a House committee on small business, headed by Representative Patman, Democrat of Texas.

This committee says it has received testimony presenting "a shocking picture of bureaucratic buck-passing, incompetent and listless administration and almost traitorous activities on the part of certain interests to protect their companies at the expense of the war effort."

The report, as the reader sees, makes two very serious charges although it does not specify the companies or the Government officials figuring in its criticism.

"Bureaucratic buck-passing, incompetent and listless administration" are terms that may be used by various individuals, depending upon their points of view. In themselves, they mean little or they may mean much.

The second charge of the committee that testimony presented a shocking picture of "almost traitorous activities on the part of certain interests to protect their companies at the expense of the war effort" seems to require additional details.

Certainly, one cannot give much attention to anonymous charges, indiscriminately directed against "certain interests." If the House committee has evidence of "almost traitorous activities," as it alleges, it should tell what they are and expose the interests that are guilty.

The committee also commented that "the war effort on the production front, as a whole, still lacks to an alarming degree efficient coordination." Once more, this is a general statement, reflecting the conclusions of individuals and should be buttressed with facts uncovered.

The assertion that small business faces extinction because of lack of sympathetic consideration in the war program is another worthless conclusion unless there are facts to support it. Moreover, if such is the case, the Congress can and should take appropriate legislative action to assure greater consideration of small business.

We have little idea that small business lacks the sympathy of the officials in charge of our war program but we realize that there is a

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U. S. Treasury Dept.

natural tendency, when dealing in tremendous quantities, to seek contracts with those able to deliver in large volume.

Under the circumstances of the Committee's report, we can hardly afford to give it much consideration. To charge certain interests with almost traitorous activities and then fail to name the interests or to describe the activities, even though they were "at the expense of the war effort," gives the committee a low rating with us.

Butter Prices Set By OPA February 16

The Office of Price Administration announced that effective February 16 all sales of butter are now under Amendment 4 to Maximum Price Regulation 289 except sales of farm butter and sales by retail stores. The latter still remains under MPR 268.

B. U. Ratchford, State Price Officer, said consumers will probably begin to see the results of this regulation within about a week from the effective date of the new amendment, since it will take about that long before retailers will be able to adjust their prices on their new purchases. In any case Ratchford said the highest price which may be charged for "93 score" butter of the very best grade by any seller in North Carolina will be 58c per pound. The highest price which retail stores will be able to sell the same butter will be 57c per pound.

Sales of farm butter, however, still remain under MPR 280 and exempt from Amendment 4 to MPR 289. Farm butter must not be higher than was charged during the period September 28 to October 2, 1942. This farm price is, in most cases, lower than the new ceiling, Ratchford declared.

At the time MPR 289 was originally issued a "freeze" method was used as a temporary expedient. This new pricing formula is based upon prices at the Chicago market, plus transportation and packaging costs. If sold through a wholesaler to retail stores, a retailer's margin is also permitted. Four methods for calculating prices are given: (1) For bulk butter, (2) For butter in prints and packages, (3) Retail sales by route-sellers, and (4) Retail sales by creameries.

Pricing information and guides to Amendment 4 to MPR 289 will be available within a few days from the Price Clerks at local War Price and Rationing Boards, or from the Price Division of OPA at Raleigh, N. C.

Applications Arrive For Cotton Insurance

More than 4,000 North Carolina cotton growers already have insured their 1943 crops under the insurance program offered by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, according to Tom M. Cornwell, Cleveland County farmer and a member of the State AAA Committee.

The insurance, which is being offered for the second year, guarantees the grower 50 or 75 percent of his normal yield against losses from causes over which he has no control such as floods, drought, windstorm, hail and insect damage. The coverage which can be obtained and rates already have been sent to cotton growers by County AAA offices.

A new war clause in the insurance this year, Cornwell said, now covers losses caused from wartime shortages of labor and materials, provided it is determined it was humanly impossible to obtain them.

"This insurance is not designed as a money-making proposition for either the grower or the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation which is an agency of the U. S. Department of Agriculture," he declared. "It mere-

tions.

As to pruning, he suggests that it be done so as to preserve the natural shape of the plant to be pruned. Flowering plants that bloom before July should not be pruned.

Trees and shrubs should not be allowed to rock around in the wind and wear a hole in the soil around their base. Anchor them with string and stake and keep the soil packed around the roots.

As to spring yard cleaning, he gives the following pointers: Don't burn over the yard and don't use a brush broom. Use a rake to remove the coarse trash and allow the fine material to remain.

He reminds all gardeners that it

is time now to plant water lilies. Use three parts of good soil and one-part of well-rotted manure, and cover with a layer of sand to hold the soil in place.

"How many people work in your office?"

"Oh, about half."

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From where I sit...

by Joe Marsh

The other day we were talking about George Washington—who besides being a great general was a surveyor, a farmer, and a wise statesman.

"And he made mighty good beer too," says Grandma Hoskins. "His private recipe's filed in the New York Public Library."

Now Grandma Hoskins knows her history—and she told us how other famous men believed in beer and moderation. William Penn, for instance, who had his own brewery and James Madison, who "urged the manufacture of beer in every State of the Union."

When the dark years of Prohibition came along, they proved how right those early American statesmen were—that no law ever takes the place of moderation.

They were right about a lot of things—Washington and Adams and Penn—and the others who founded America. And from where I sit they were certainly right about moderation too.

Joe Marsh

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Start Work On Home Yards And Gardens

Don't wait for spring blossoms to remind you, but begin now to clean-up and plan the home yards and gardens, urges John H. Harris, Landscape Extension Specialist of N. C. State College. March is the last month before next fall for the planting of fruit trees, grapes, strawberries, dewberries and other small fruits.

Harris points out that rose bushes, fruit trees and diseased shrubs should be sprayed with lime-sulphur. That trees, shrubs and lawn should be fertilized with manure and perhaps some phosphate. No fertilizer containing inorganic nitrogen can be used for this purpose under present regulations.

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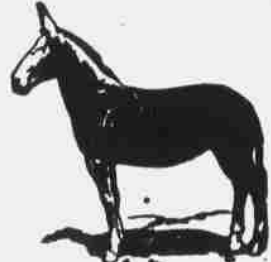
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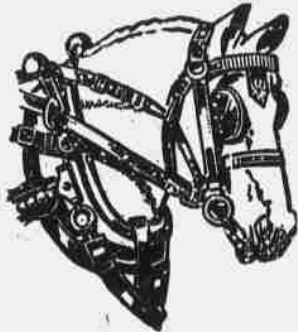
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