

# Economists Rate '74 Farm Year Tops

By GARY STEWART  
Mirror Staff Writer

According to extension economists at North Carolina State University, 1973 was a

record shattering year for farmers and another good year is seen for '74. However, increasing costs of fertilizer, feed, fuel and other necessary items will probably make it

impossible for the farmer to improve on last year's salary. According to NCSU economists, realized net farm income probably reached \$25 billion in '73, up over \$5 billion

from the record set the year before.

Those same economists predict that the first half of '74 will prove good for producers of meat but the last half of the year won't be so good.

Consumer demand is expected to be up by six to eight percent in the first half of the year but should decrease three to four percent late in the year.

Feeder cattle in the 500 pound range is expected to bring 52-54 cents per pound through March and 53-55 cents the second quarter of the year.

A check at the Shelby Sale Barn last week saw prices good, but cattlemen in this area note that you can't foresee from one week to the next how the prices will be. Last week, bulls and steers in the 500 pound range were bringing an average of about 50 cents a pound.

Although 50 cents a pound for beef sounds like a big price for the cattlemen, it's not quite so big when one considers that cost of fertilizer, feed and other items have more than doubled the past few years.

Jack Hughes, a local cattlemen and turkey farmer, pointed out that the same fence posts he paid 54 cents apiece for when he built his farm costs \$1.18 apiece now and the same wire he paid \$7 a roll for is almost \$20 a roll now.

"If a man buys a farm now, cows will never pay for it," predicted Hughes. "The man in between has to be making the money or else is using it up with expenses. The man on the farm doesn't make money."

Hughes pointed out that the costs of maintaining farm equipment has also skyrocketed and added that farm labor is almost impossible to find.

"You can go to a tractor place to buy some little part that you expect to be two dollars and it will be 10," he noted. "There's not a thing we can do about the prices we pay. But when you sell a cow, you have to take what they offer."

As for the turkey end of his operation, Hughes said he works by contract but the "trouble with turkey contracts is that they're the same as they were 15 years ago."

"A cent a week is all they're paying to grow pullets," he pointed out, "and for a penny

a week you can't even pay for a house when you consider it costs \$1.75-\$2.00 a foot to build one."

Hughes pointed out that in the past he has raised 75,000 turkeys a year but is cutting his operation this year to about 16,000. He said all will be raised in the houses as inability to find help makes it impossible to put the turkeys on the range.

He said packing companies control the prices since most turkeys are grown by contract.

"For instance," he says, "I sold my turkeys in November and have been out for three

months. If they (the packing companies) don't grow as many, they can keep the prices up. I spend \$20,000 for a house and they let it stand empty for a third of the year."

"You can't do anything about it unless you go on your own and then they might not take them when you want to sell."

Hughes went on to say that the average farmer can't afford to go on his own, noting that with feed in excess of \$150 per ton he would have to borrow money from a bank to finance his own operation.

"Then," he said, "you run into high interest charges."

According to Hughes, if a turkey farmer grew out his own turkeys, it would cost him around 70 cents per turkey.

"And," he continued, "I have to disagree with the North Carolina State economists who predict that '74 will be close to '73. I don't expect things to be real bad but they're not going to be nearly as good as last year."

Hughes said turkey prices will have to go down, as 210 million pounds of turkey meat were held over from last year. "Prices got too high last year," he said, "and the

housewives didn't buy it. Therefore, it's going to have to go down in order to sell it."

Hughes also predicted beef prices will go down and that when it does, it will force turkey prices down about 15 cents per pound.

The price situation, Hughes feels, boils down to the housewife and he feels most housewives aren't going to continue to pay high prices for meat.

"The housewife is no dummy," Hughes stated. "She knows how much money she has to spend for groceries. If meat is too high, she'll find a substitute."

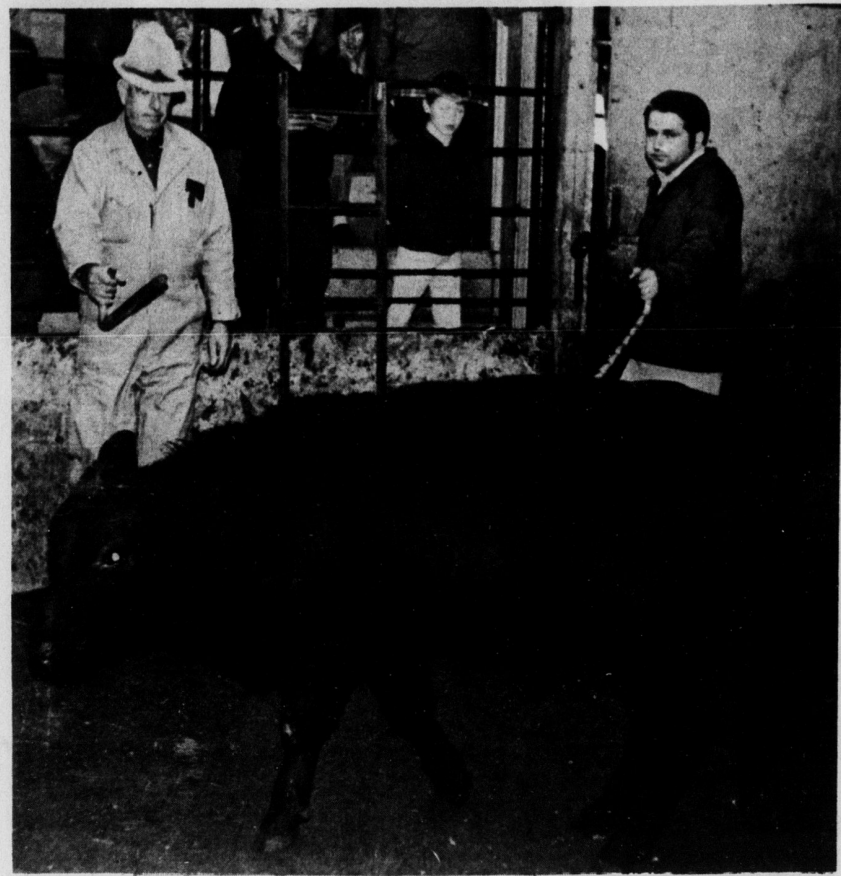


Photo by Gary Stewart

HEAD 'EM UP! - This black angus bull is on its way to someone's freezer, most likely, and chances are he'll eventually cost the consumer a pretty penny. Beef prices are expected to be high the first half of 1974 but should slack off some later in the year.

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## Apple Growers Class Set

Apple growers and those with interests in apple marketing will not want to miss the chance to attend the Apple Marketing and Packing House School to be held this week.

The school began Wednesday, and continues tonight at 7:00 p.m. at the County Office Building, 130 S. Post Rd. in Shelby. The school will be available at no charge to anyone interested in apple marketing.

Curtis Styles, Cleveland County Assistant Agricultural Extension Agent explains that "Marketing is one phase of apple production that often presents more problems to growers and is oftentimes the least understood." I think that this school will be an excellent opportunity to get a better understanding of apple marketing problems and possible solutions. This will be even more important as time goes by since our production continues to increase at a rapid rate", said Styles.

Agricultural Extension Marketing Specialists from NC State University will be on hand at the school. In addition to providing a good basic understanding of the apple packing house facilities. The types of business organization, such as cooperative, partnership, general corporation, and individual, will be explained at the Apple Marketing and Packing House School. Also apple packers and growers from successful packing and marketing firms will be on hand for panel discussions at the school.

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