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1972

*Agriculture*

Proceedings of  
**THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETING CONFERENCE**

Denver, Colorado

April 27-29, 1971

**Sponsored by:**

**Consumer and Marketing Service, USDA  
USDA and State Extension Services  
Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy  
Foreign Agricultural Service, USDA  
National Association of Marketing Officials  
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture  
USDA and Cooperative USDA-State Research Service**

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FOREWARD

The sponsoring agencies and the Program Committee express their appreciation to the speakers; the individuals who served as Steering Committee--Discussion Leaders for the various work groups; the Secretary-Consultants; and to those individuals who served as Chairmen of the various sessions. The smooth functioning of the Conference was due to work of many groups and individuals but particularly to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the Colorado Extension Service, and the Colorado Experiment Station.

Copies of these proceedings may be obtained from the Matching Fund Program Staff, Consumer and Marketing Service, USDA, Washington, D. C. 20250.

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## ALTERNATIVE MARKETING SYSTEMS OF THE FUTURE

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In the future, farmers will polarize their farming operations around their marketing program. Marketing will become a more critical lever over farming. The farmer's economic progress will be more dependent upon what happens off the farm than on the farm.

### Alternatives With Own Organization

Off the farm, the farmer will find the marketing arrangement needed to secure a "home" for his product and to obtain adequate production financing. He will find his marketing arrangements either in his own or someone else's organization. With few exceptions, commercial farmers and ranchers will be a part of organized marketing in order to survive. Those farmers and ranchers who belong to their own marketing organization will have four alternatives. These are:

1. Farmers organized into cooperatives integrated forward into the distribution system to advantageously market outputs and/or integrated backward into the supply industries to procure inputs.
2. Farmers organized into bargaining associations to negotiate price and other terms of contract with handlers and food converters.
3. Farmers combining bargaining with marketing within own cooperative organizations.
4. Joint ventures between farmer-owned cooperatives and regionally or nationally organized marketing corporations on a joint ownership or contractual basis.

Farmer Cooperatives - Cooperative marketing of farm products and/or the procurement of needed equipment, supplies and services offers the greatest promise to the farmer. Through integration, both forward from the farmer to the consumer and backward into the farm input generating industries, the farmer can obtain maximum returns on his management, labor and investment.

Cooperatives in the Seventies will perform more of the vital functions of marketing than just assembling and initial processing. They will, in order to survive, relate more realistically to the ultimate market, and perform more product refinements, marketing and marketing services needed to win and keep a place in the market. In short, many of them will develop a more integrated food system.

These cooperatives, though fewer in numbers by the end of the Seventies than today, will handle a larger share of the total agricultural business. There are two reasons for this. First, more large producers, recognizing the emerging role of cooperatives, will become members of existing organizations; and second, the dollar volume per member will increase. Primary emphasis will be on mergers of existing cooperatives in order to acquire a broader line of food products and marketing services rather than organizing new cooperatives. Regional cooperatives will establish and keep strong local co-ops.

Cooperatives will offer the farmer a "home" for his product. The "home" will take the form of a marketing arrangement which will be established even before the

planting of the seed or the breeding of the cow. Cooperatives will usurp some, but not all, of the decision-making powers exercised by the farmer today. The farmer will transfer some of the decision-making to his cooperative for two reasons: first, the cooperative will need certain assurances in order to enter into forward specification contracts with buyers; and second, the co-op will need to have some control over the quality and quantity of production. Just any kind of production will not be acceptable to co-ops, nor anyone else. Farmers, through their co-ops, can more accurately foretell market needs and thus shape production operations. Farmers will keep more of their cherished decision-making role in this system than if they belong to someone else's organization.

Cooperatives will also give farmers added profits through marketing. Co-ops can more nearly reflect consumer prices back to the producer, increase marketing efficiency, expand markets for their products and create new products and marketing opportunities. These activities generate additional returns to supplement whatever income farmers generate through production.

Farmer Bargaining - Bargaining is another alternative for those who belong to their own organization. However, this is not a panacea, as some would have you believe, nor is it a movement to be ignored.

Bargaining will continue to be an important part of the American agricultural scene, at least during the Seventies (and perhaps fade thereafter). There are several reasons why we will have more bargaining in the Seventies. First, by 1980, half of our agricultural products will be produced or sold under contract. In another fifteen years, three-quarters of our products will be handled that way. Second, more and more farmers are learning that they cannot obtain fair market prices and reasonable contract terms by acting alone. Third, finding the right price is becoming increasingly difficult, especially in view of the declining role of terminal markets and fewer publicly announced prices. Fourth, there will be more interest in marketing as agricultural products move from under the government's umbrella. Fifth, there will be more direct selling under more stringent specifications. Sixth, for some farmers, bargaining will be the only tool to get their fair share of the consumer food price in the emerging food system and to more nearly balance the relative strengths of producers and processors. Seventh, it provides a means for producers to lock their production into the marketing arrangements, or to be assured a market.

The prime role of bargaining will be to help farmers and ranchers achieve equity in the contract market, or in that market where a contract can be devised. In short, the role of bargaining is to achieve fairness in contract trading--to influence how the economic pie is sliced in the contract market. Bargaining will always be a delicate economic process. There is no way to bargain directly with consumers or to force the distribution system to relay on to consumers the farmers' price demands.

The keys to bargaining success include: (1) participation by most producers, (2) control of high percentage of total volume, (3) strong regional or national organization to balance producer and processor strengths, (4) adequate financing, (5) capable economic and marketing expertise, (6) control over synthetics and imports, (7) willingness of producers to accept their association as the bargaining agent, (8) willingness of producers to create and operate their own supply management program, (9) bargaining simultaneously for substitutable products, (10) willingness of farmers and members to bear the cost of eliminating, diverting or allocating their products, (11) creation of an atmosphere of trust and "togetherness" between producers and processors.



Withholding as we have known it during the Sixties will not be a part of the bargaining process in the Seventies. It did not serve a useful purpose then, nor can we expect it to serve a useful purpose in the Seventies. Farmers do not have "withholding power" once the life process is begun.

Farmers cannot absorb bargaining success or failure as readily as labor because of their large investment in land, equipment and livestock. Most bargaining associations have not set up the supply management machinery which is necessary to maintain success. There is evidence of additional legislative needs in agricultural bargaining; however, there is no agreement as to what this should be. Farmers should not ask, nor should consumers allow, the government to bargain for farmers.

Combined Bargaining with Marketing - Bargaining will bring limited success to most producer groups. It is becoming more and more apparent that bargaining can be more successful if it is part of the agricultural industry's total marketing effort. That is, if bargaining becomes one department in its marketing organization.

There are several reasons why I believe the farmers should consider combining bargaining with marketing:

1. So long as contract markets and open markets operate side by side as they now do for many agricultural commodities, producers need an organization capable of serving their interests simultaneously and advantageously in each market.
2. The producer's largest income potential lies in greater efficiency, which can be more readily achieved through marketing than bargaining.
3. By combining bargaining with marketing, producers more realistically relate to economic laws of the marketplace, rather than make price the whole ballgame as they do in using bargaining alone.
4. Through this combination they are more apt to manage supplies as to timing, quantity and quality, place and form.
5. Producers are more apt to support group effort if the benefits derived need not be shared with non-members. Such "locked-in" or "closed shop" arrangements are most feasible when bargaining is combined with marketing.
6. Bargaining will switch from "price bargaining" to "cost bargaining." Marketing experience helps "cost bargaining" work smoothly and more equitably.
7. Market building, so necessary to stymie the competition from synthetics and substitutes, is most apt to be assumed if producers engage in marketing some portion of the product.

Joint Venture - The fourth alternative for producers who market through their own cooperative is to join into mutually beneficial arrangements with aggressive regional or national marketing corporations. In such cases, the farmer furnishes the raw product, the two joint venture on the processing plant and the corporation does the marketing, market research, product development and market development.

In joint-venture arrangements, there are only two prices: (1) the price the consumer pays and (2) the price retailers and institutions pay to obtain the supplies from the marketing firm. The producer's price is derived by subtracting from the finished product price the joint-venture costs and other costs previously negotiated. Examples of joint venture are few today, but will increase especially as cooperatives gain strength and demonstrate greater business capabilities and responsibilities.

Joint ventures are expected to be relatively long-term arrangements. The terms of the arrangement are expected to be negotiated annually, but its termination would have major economic impact on both parties.

### Alternatives Without Own Organization

For those farmers who do not belong to their own organization there will be one of three choices: (1) become a part of a food processor's or distributor's backward integration complex or (2) market own products through a roadside market, cafe or similar facility or (3) drop out of farming. Certainly producers will lose the right "to produce what they please, when they please, where they please, how they please." Producers will not be able to stand apart from organized marketing and stay in business.

As farmers and ranchers become part of someone else's backward integrated operation, production will be prearranged to meet the processor's needs. This type of arrangement will assure the processors or food companies of the amount and quality of product they desire at the time and place they want it. Failing to get this assurance, these type food companies are apt to do their own farming.

Farmers who are part of someone else's backward integration process are assured of a "home" for their products as long as they conform to the terms of the contract and generate results expected. They will have less voice in this type of marketing arrangement than if they belonged to their own marketing cooperative. These backward integrators will strive to provide producers with much the same services and rewards as provided by cooperatives, provided the cooperatives are capable of influencing the product's marketing system. They will be able to compete with cooperatives through fair and profitable treatment of their producers. An attractive contract will be the life blood of the processor or food company that integrates backward.

Some farmers and ranchers will stay in business by marketing their products through their own facilities, such as a roadside market. Even here, change will occur. I look for roadside marketeers to organize for greater marketing effectiveness. This could take the form of a franchising-type organization. It could take the form of an association to undertake advertising, management training, sales training, record-keeping, point-of-purchase material production, quality control, etc on a group basis. Those who produce and market their own production through their own facilities will seek the advantages that can come to them through organization.

Those farmers and ranchers who choose not to be a part of their own marketing organization, or lack their own marketing facilities, or fail to be absorbed in someone else's backward organization will in a short while drop out of farming.

### Some Food Corporations Will Farm

Some marketing corporations will produce part or all of their own raw products. Some food companies engage in farming today. Many of these will continue to produce part or all of their raw products. This could increase or decrease depending upon the willingness of producers to supply products under specification contracts and the price and other terms they demand. If family-type farmers become more difficult, or are reluctant to enter into specification contracts, the incidents of food companies engaging in farming could increase. If producers are capable and willing to assume the responsibility for delivering the food companies' raw product requirements, the incidents of their engaging in farming could decrease.

Food companies would rather engage in food conversion than in farming. Thus, in most cases, farming will become a last resort for them. Food companies will engage in farming not to reduce procurement costs, but to be able to manage their marketing program. Generally, family farms can produce more cheaply than company farms. Food companies are not so much in the need of minimizing procurement costs as they are to make them predictable. By knowing their cost structure, they can enter into forward contracting or forward marketing arrangements with greater confidence and assurance of desired profit levels.

### Conclusion

For the time being, none of these systems will operate to the exclusion of the others. One may be more adaptable to some commodities, and to some people than others. But regardless of the system, farmers will find themselves working together in marketing more than ever before. This togetherness can be a source of increased "farmer market power" and ultimately greater net income.

In time, other alternative marketing systems or combinations might emerge. Some will adapt to change more quickly than others. The ones that will prevail will be customer-oriented, relying on integrated marketing management to generate profit through consumer satisfaction.

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