

WHEAT MARKETING

The 1983/84 wheat harvest has been the most trying that most, even older farmers, have had to cope with. December produced more rain than June or July, crops were flattened, and green rubbish appeared above them. The grain, in many cases underweight before the rain, became lighter, and eventually sprouted in the head.

In the Western Wheatbelt, before the rain, the crops had been quite good so farmers were faced with the sale of quite a lot of damaged grain. Some of the damaged grain which became inferior to the wheat board's arbitrary standards was high in protein and therefore superior in another way.

At every siding Co-op Bulk Handling staff, armed with a book of arbitrary rules and bits of machinery for measuring some of the more easily measured attributes of wheat, but not necessarily the most important attributes, tried valiantly to price each load as it arrived at the siding. Sometimes when loads were rejected or downgraded, farmers took the load home, mixed it with other wheat so as to raise its average above some standard, and brought the same wheat back. Other times they just parked the truck in the shed over night and brought it back, or took the wheat to another siding to have it accepted.

The temptation is to blame the sampling officer for the obvious inadequacies of the system. However, only a very foolish farmer back-chats samplers, and any way it isn't fair. The farmers themselves, not the samplers, are responsible for a system which can't cope with diversity.

For the most part our wheat handling and marketing arrangements prevent diversity developing, and the costs are hidden. It is only when nature takes a hand that they become apparent. None-the-less the lost rewards of a system which has no place for the production of extra high quality but lower yielding bread wheats, or high yielding stock feed wheats, or the combination of high protein but poor baking strength for say poultry feed, must be high. I suspect far higher than the more obvious foul-up this year.

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics is a group of highly competent economists who have been known to publish reports critical of government policy, but they are all on the public pay roll and are unlikely to buck the system just for the fun of it. Their criticisms are, as is proper, muted and confined to those matters that can be backed with hard evidence.

The Bureau of Ag. Economics
They estimate that if the domestic market were freed from the shackles of the 'system', growers could expect \$20 to \$25 per tonne or 16% to 20% more. A farmer producing only 800 tonnes of wheat could get \$16,000 more without adding to his on farm costs.

I cannot understand why farmers are so in love with their socialised selling and handling system when they are so against government interference on their farms. Perhaps they wrongly think that somebody else is bearing the cost of this inefficiency.

Last week the Agricultural Council - the ~~meeting~~
that annual meeting of State & Federal Agriculture
ministers - decided to discontinue ~~the~~ wheat sales,
just a little bit, by allowing growers to sell ^{only} with
industrial wheat based permits, ~~except~~ to stock feed users.
We have taken growers everywhere but in two & Queensland &
even in The one characteristic ~~and~~ socialist voice was
the Queensland Country Party government.