

Things to Talk About

AT A RECENT meeting of a Montana farm organization time was provided for a general discussion of types of programs that would be appropriate for community groups. While some community leaders made worthwhile suggestions there seemed to be a general feeling that it is difficult to plan the kind of meetings that will hold the interest of members.

"We just can't seem to think of anything to talk about," admitted one local program committee chairman.

That was too much for one of the national organization leaders who was in attendance. He reminded the meeting of the strenuous battle for a revised price support plan that had just been concluded by congress. He told of the fight against powerful opposition groups to secure a moderate stepping up of the minimum levels of support for basic farm commodities. He pointed out that the victory that had been won after many weeks of struggle meant that the wheat price support level that will be in effect in 1950 will be 30 cents a bushel higher than that provided by the law that was being amended.

And then he concluded by asking how it was that the folks at home couldn't think of anything to talk about, when all that was going on at Washington and when so many other questions of national agricultural policy are yet to be decided. How right he was.

There is the fundamental difference of opinion between farm organizations as well as among individual farmers as to proper policy regarding support levels. Some believe that rigid supports should be provided

while others feel that flexible supports will prove more workable.

Then there is the highly controversial Brannan plan of direct payments which is good for a spirited discussion in any farm group. Some think it is the only real answer to the farm surplus problem as far as perishable commodities are concerned. And others are just as convinced that it would pave the way for a complete loss of freedom for American farmers.

Then there are the matters of local interest such as organization of rural telephone lines, better roads, establishment of soil conservation districts, community action to control trespassing, better school facilities, etc.

Questions of world peace, atomic control, how best to deal with the Soviet government and racial equality are among many that should be fully discussed at local levels.

These and countless other questions provide subjects for group discussions that would not only hold the interest of members but promote a better understanding of the principles involved.

Most important of all is the subject of American freedom. How far can we go in adjusting to a machine age, and in establishing reasonable and necessary controls, without sacrificing fundamental principles of liberty upon which this republic was founded? Freedom is everybody's business and everyone should do his share in safeguarding it.

Who said there is nothing to talk about at community meetings?

Profit in Farm Herds and Flocks

WHEN a successful financier was asked for the secret of his success some years ago he replied: "I buy when everyone wants to sell, and sell when everyone else wants to buy."

An example of the successful working out of that philosophy was reported recently by the First National Bank of Glasgow (Montana). A Valley county irrigation farmer who understood livestock and its care, borrowed money from the bank two or three years ago to buy 300 ewes. It was at a time when many range operators were going out of sheep because of the difficulty of getting dependable shepherders and other help.

This farmer sold 283 lambs the first year for \$3,737.35. The wool from 300 ewes sold for \$1,441.50. This made a total gross income of \$5,178.85 from the 300 ewes in one year. This grower paid off his loan and still has the 300 ewes.

The moral of this success story is not that every farmer should go and do likewise. But this experience does serve to indicate that there is an opportunity in sheep for some producers who know how to handle livestock, or can learn to do so, and whose farms are suited to such an operation. It is particularly significant now that many wheatgrowers are complying with the acreage allotment program. Some of these grain farms where water supplies are avail-

able could be adapted to a moderate sized sheep production enterprise. Sheep would work particularly well on some irrigated farms. Similar opportunities are available with cattle.

There is increasing evidence that a trend toward farm herds and flocks is under way and will continue. Managers of some of the cattle sales this fall have reported that considerable numbers of foundation animals have been purchased by wheatgrowers who are putting some of their surplus acreage into grass. This is a wholesome move that may well be followed by many other farmers whose places and personal inclinations are suited to livestock. A modest investment in a few head of good stock can be developed into a substantial livestock operation in a comparatively short time.

Although largest pig crop on record is now going to market prices have held up better than many market experts expected. The decline from peak levels of last summer has been substantial, however, and consumers are buying pork chops for about one-third less than a few months ago. Lard is about 38 percent lower in retail price than at the high point last year. Consumption is increasing and the American Meat Institute estimates that the average person in the United States will eat 153 pounds of meat of all kinds in 1950. This would be 6 pounds more than in 1949 and 14 pounds more than the pre-war average.

Straws in the Wind

If export barter deals made by other countries keep increasing, United States may eventually have to operate along similar lines. Some foreign countries that now have agricultural surpluses are beginning to take markets away from us through these special arrangements. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) plan to swap farm surpluses for devalued foreign currencies is receiving more serious consideration at Washington than official statements on the subject would indicate.

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Surplus wheat, rice and cotton may be shipped to India and other countries of the Far East in 1950 in exchange for strategic materials if plans being formulated by the administration work out.

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Domestic wheat carryover next July may not be any greater than at the end of the last marketing year. Exports will stay quite high for another year or two. World wheat agreement assures minimum export of 168,000,000 bushels for another three years.

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Importance of export market for important U. S. farm products is indicated by the following estimated percentages of total 1948-49 production that has been exported: Wheat 39, rice 38, cotton 33, tobacco 25, soybeans 25, peanuts 23, lard 20, dry beans and peas 13, cheese 12, Irish and sweet potatoes 10, fresh fruit 5.

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PMA policy of basing 1950 potato acreage allotments entirely on trends toward increased production gave Montana a 19 percent reduction from 1949 acreage, the sharpest cut of any state. Other states that were cut most heavily are Wyoming 16%, North Dakota and New York 15%, Maine 14%, Washington and South Carolina 13%, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania 12%, and Michigan 10%.

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Use of commercial fertilizer in Montana increased from a 1935-39 average of 1,769 tons to a total of 4,220 tons in 1948. In Wyoming, the increase was from 812 tons to 1,700.

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Dairymen won an improved position in the farm support program under the agricultural act of 1949. Here's what the new law says: "The price of whole milk, butterfat and the products of such commodities, respectively, shall be supported at such level not in excess of 90 per centum nor less than 75 per centum of the parity price therefor as the secretary determines necessary in order to assure an adequate supply. Such price support shall be provided through loans on, or purchases of, the products of milk and butterfat."

Montana Farmer-Stockman

—COVERS MONTANA AND NORTHERN WYOMING—
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Vol. 37, No. 7