

Text and photos  
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Now that we've received a few rain showers, enough to put the green back in our lawns, it's easy to forget others who still need precious moisture. The effects of this long dry spell will leave a lasting impression for farmers all across the Midwest, and just as much for those farmers who operate on the outskirts of the metro area.

There's no doubt it's been a very dry and difficult year, says part-time farmer Robert Eberhard, Sr. His family has been operating the Curvecrest farm in Oakdale near the eastern border of the city and Interstate 694.

This isn't the first time he has seen a serious drought. "Back in 1936 it was a very dry year..." Eberhard recalls his childhood days. As a 6-year-old, he helped his father pull in a sparse crop from the very same fields he farms today.

Eberhard has been raising Brown Swiss dairy cattle for over eight years now. Before that time he raised beef cattle until his daughters took an interest in Brown Swiss.

Eberhard grows his own grains to feed his cattle. His crops consist of corn, hay and alfalfa. So far this year he has received a good return on his first cutting of hay, but the outlook on the alfalfa crop isn't as promising. It is a more delicate crop and needs to be shielded by the previously cut hay until the middle stages of its life. His corn crop has also suffered substantially, but all is not lost. "I'll just pull it in and turn it into silage," he explains. The stunted corn will then be used as a filler feed through the winter months.

Most years he purchases feed from the market to make it through the late winter months. But this year he will need to make his purchases earlier in the season than usual. A question of when to buy occurs. "It's a gamble..." Eberhard admits. Prices change daily and he wants to pay the lowest possible price. If it continues to rain, the prices of market grains will decrease. On the other hand, if the weather is hot and dry, prices could increase.

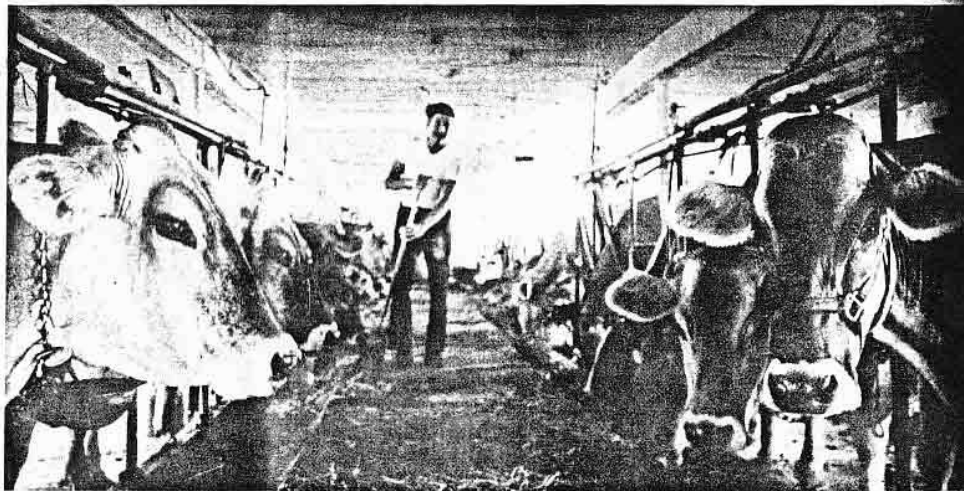
Some farmers have been trying to get by with what little crop they have. While attending a Brown Swiss convention in Illinois during July, Eberhard heard some startling news. Apparently southern farmers had been feeding their cattle immature corn that had been contaminated with nutrients from fertiliz-



ROBERT EBERHARD, Sr. looks out toward his fields with an optimistic attitude, hoping that next year will be more productive.



EBERHARD PREPARES a cow for milking. His herd produces dozens of gallons of milk a day.



EBERHARD, pictured at right, sweeps fresh straw into the troughs for his Brown Swiss cattle.

ers that normally disappear when the corn matures. When immature corn is fed to cattle the result can be sickness or death.

Eberhard believes the media sometimes underestimates the farm crisis the drought has caused. He feels overall crop loss percentages given by the media are inaccurate. "I know some farmers who are losing over 70 percent of their crop," he states. News gathering sources have

estimated damages and losses at 30 to 40 percent in soybean, corn, and wheat crops across the nation.

Though the losses may be large, price increases at the supermarkets, especially for grain products like bread and cereal, should not occur for months, according to Eberhard. He believes grocery wholesalers (the middle men) are taking advantage of the situation and

are unfairly raising prices now.

Eberhard compares price changes in the supermarket with that of the gas pump. When OPEC raises the price of oil due to a shortage or other circumstances, consumers usually see gasoline prices jump quickly. Theoretically the higher priced oil hasn't reached the gas pumps yet due to the length of time it takes to ship and refine it. Instead the supply that is already here is

marked up.

According to Eberhard, similar economic activity sometimes occurs with food prices. Some supermarket suppliers mark up their prices on food that has already been stored and blame the high price on shortages caused by the drought.

Although Eberhard believes milk prices will not be affected by the drought, his daughter Cathy tends to disagree. Either way

they will be experiencing a loss this year. In order to compensate Eberhard will ration his herd.

Despite the financial and uncertainty, the family remains quite optimistic.

"It's not the end of the world," says Eberhard, who still has memories of a 6-year-old helping his dad harvest a crop.