

**Ferdie J. Deering**

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# State Shoe Industry Holds Promise

**L**OOK at your shoes! They probably were manufactured in Italy, Taiwan or some other country. Why not the United States?

Some day, you might be wearing shoes made in Oklahoma, from hides tanned in Oklahoma, from steers raised in Oklahoma or in adjoining states. We have all of the elements needed, except the "put together," and state industrial promoters have been working on that for almost two years.

The hide and shoe business is typical of our agricultural colonialism, or perhaps it should be called by another name. We produce something, ship the raw materials across the country or half way around the world, where they are made into products, and then shipped back to where they started, at a higher price.

Whether the cattlemen make any money out of hides or not, it looks like transportation firms are doing big business. And if manufacturers can make a profit out of turning our hides into their shoes 1,000 or 10,000 miles from here, why can't we do the same work at a profit for Oklahomans in Oklahoma?

In FY 1971-72, the United States exported \$236 million worth of hides and skins. About one-third of that value came from Oklahoma and adjoining states, plus Louisiana and Nebraska. That total jumped to \$364 million for cattle hides alone in 1972-73. The United States is the world's largest exporter of hides.

While shoe factories have been struggling with federal regulations, high labor costs and imported leather, certain interests have been promoting increased export of Ameri-

can hides. A major effort is being made in Oklahoma to turn that situation around.

An environmental impact study on a possible cattle hide tannery establishment in Oklahoma already has been made, and the state Department of Industrial Development, the state Chamber of Commerce, local chambers of commerce, and a dozen other agencies and groups are pushing for it to be built. Dr. R. L. Hendrickson of the Oklahoma State University Animal Science and Industry department is investigating new tanning methods.

Ted Savage, manager of the Ada Chamber of Commerce, is one of the main pushers, although present plans call for the tannery to be located at Clinton-Sherman Industrial

Park in Western Oklahoma, 150 miles away.

What Ada wants out of the deal is a shoe factory, and they have some prospects. If Ada can get a factory, others might be located at Pauls Valley and elsewhere.

There's a billion dollar difference between value of the hides the United States exports and the value of the shoes we import. Oklahoma industrialists wouldn't have to capture a very big chunk of that to make their efforts worthwhile.

Oklahoma is located in the middle of what promoters call the "green hide belt", where one-third of the nation's cattle are within easy hauling distance and slaughtering is increasing. With that resource available, we ought to be making a lot of shoes!