

**Ferdie J. Deering**

## Oklahoma Can Become Center For Processing, Marketing

**A**NNOUCEMENT that Peter Eckrich and Sons, Inc., will build a plant in Oklahoma City to process specialty meats is further evidence of how important agriculture is to the non-farming community.

Joseph E. Quinlan, chairman of the board, told a group of Oklahoma City civic leaders that the plant will employ 200 workers at the start and that this could grow to 300 workers.

That is 200 to 300 jobs based on agriculture, none of which is directly involved in production of agricultural commodities. In fact, Eckrich does not slaughter livestock, but buys quality cuts of beef and pork to process to their own product formulas.

Nevertheless, addition of the plant to the industrial and livestock community will strengthen both. It will provide a stronger market competition for meat animals and it also will employ a sizable number of non-farm workers.

Oklahoma has never developed agricultural processing and marketing industries to the extent that we should have. Nearly all of our research has been aimed at improving production, which is good, but we need processing and marketing, too.

From the beginning, most of what we grow has been shipped out to other states for processing. This simply means that other states have our non-farm jobs and our non-farm income.

A farmer gets only about five cents for the wheat that goes into a 48 cent loaf of bread, and the cotton grower may not get enough out of the cotton that goes into a shirt to pay for laundering his own.

The proportion of the retail food

dollar received by producers is higher for meat animals than from other commodities, but over all, producers receive only 38 to 42 cents of the dollar.

City workers receive the remaining 58 to 62 cents for processing, canning, packaging, transportation, wholesaling and retailing. These involve more jobs than production does.

When executives of Peter Eckrich and Sons, Inc., started out from home base in Fort Wayne, Ind., looking for a new location, they visited quite a few places. They kept coming back to Oklahoma and found what they wanted. The convenient geographic location was important, but so were other considerations.

This has been the case with a number of industries in various lines of business. Oklahoma has something to offer to those who want to build factories, hire willing workers, and manufacture products to sell here and elsewhere.

Many of them have to ship in raw materials, such as rubber for making tires. But here we are in the midst of substantial agricultural production, with additional large supplies available from adjacent states, and we ship out our valuable raw resources for someone else to process and market.

Then we export our oil and gas to provide energy for their factories and export Oklahoma-educated young people to become their executives, managers, technicians and salespeople.

If other states can make a profit processing and marketing what we grow, why can't it be done here, too? Peter Eckrich and Sons, Inc., says it can. Who will be next?