

# Like Drugs, Subsidies Painful to Quit

A MAN who is quite knowledgeable about the livestock industry commented over lunch recently that if the government were offering to buy surplus beef at guaranteed prices, refrigerated warehouses might soon be filled with government-owned meat.

As it is, there is no direct subsidy or loan program for beef and the industry is making its own adjustments between supply and demand. It is costly to producers and consumers benefit.

There is a price support program for milk producers. John R. Block, secretary of agriculture, recently blasted it because it is expected to cost \$2.2 billion this fiscal year. "Taxpayers of this country are giving the dairy industry a quarter of a million dollars every hour ... It is unacceptable," Block declared.

The basic question is who is being subsidized — producers, processors, retailers or consumers? Milk producers aren't getting rich. Thousands have gone out of business and spokesmen say more may be forced out if the dairy price support pro-

gram is discontinued. If government did not pay part of the cost of production, it is argued, consumers would have to pay more for their milk, butter and cheese.

There also are federal price support and loan programs for corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, peanuts, wool and feed grains.

A few weeks ago Congress appropriated additional funds to bring to \$20 billion the total for agricultural price support and loan programs to keep our food supply chain functioning.

But look at what we are laying out to subsidize non-farm programs. New Treasury figures show that New York and California each received more than \$10 billion for state and local government aid in fiscal 1981. Those two states got more subsidies than all of the farmers in the United States. Oklahoma governments received a little more than \$1 billion, less than national average per capita.

Delegations of state and local officials have been flying to Washington to relate their sad stories of disasters they fear may result if their

total of \$81.4 billion in subsidies is reduced.

While farmers are severely criticized for aid they may receive, some of their critics are campaigning for increased subsidies for broadcasting, sculpture, paintings, ballet and other arts.

Just one program to dress up federal buildings with taxpayer financed art resulted in 173 sculptures, murals and craftworks at a cost of more than \$6 million. Some may have considered that food and even other non-farm subsidies might have been more beneficial.

When bureaucrats in Holland were authorized to buy art with public funds about half of that country's full-time painters and sculptors went on the government payroll. It could happen here.

Federal subsidies have been likened to characteristics of drug addiction — temporary suppression of pain, concealment, progressive dependency, high cost, and the prospect of painful withdrawal when access to Uncle Sam's pocketbook is threatened.