

## Farm News Justifies Ample Coverage

**D**URING A LULL in judging at the Oklahoma City 4-H & FFA Livestock show, ringside conversations got around to the growing indifference to agriculture and agricultural news coverage.

One man commented that newspaper farm editors are becoming fewer and that radio/TV stations are devoting less time to farm news. In addition, much of the news reported is slanted to sympathize with consumers rather than to give balanced treatment to producers.

Frequently, observed a second man, news editors who feel agriculture needs some coverage will send out "the lowest person on the totem pole" to do the job. He cited ludicrous errors resulting from "city hick" reporters' reluctance to ask questions.

Another pointed out that these trends should be expected, as each generation enlarges the proportion of our population who have never lived on a farm, or visited one, or who even know a farmer.

Even such common terms as steer, heifer, barrow and wether are not always comprehended by urban

residents, and that includes a few people who sometimes write about livestock.

Recently when President Reagan visited Oklahoma some of his staff thought it would be desirable to arrange a short ranch tour while he was in one of the nation's top cattle states. Several telephone calls were made to Ellis Freeny, executive vice president of Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, but the tour didn't work out.

In one of the phone conversations a White House staff member inquired: "Are there any large ranches between Tinker Field and the Skirvin Plaza hotel that the president might visit?" Our term "wide open spaces" is not clearly understood in Washington.

Although agriculture is one of Oklahoma's foundation industries and is a major asset in our nation's world trade, it often appears that the public's only concern is the retail price of food.

Consumers can understand what it means to be laid off their factory jobs or what it might mean to have their pay cut in half, but not many

seem to grasp the fact that this is what is happening to farmers and ranchers, upon whom they depend for their daily bread.

The latest USDA report shows that at \$3.67 per bushel, wheat is selling for 51 percent of parity. It would cost consumers \$7.18 per bushel for wheat to make bread, breakfast cereals and other foods if farmers were receiving the equivalent of urban wages.

At \$55.60 per cwt. beef cattle were 59 percent of parity's \$94.00 per cwt. Steak is still a bargain at that price level!

A recent Gallup Poll showed the median estimate of family expenditures for food and milk each week is \$70. Many people think this is too much, but could they hire somebody to grow crops and raise livestock they eat for a mere \$3,640 a year? Or would they do it all themselves in order to save that much?

Although people in our great cities may never fully comprehend its significance, agriculture is a topic that is newsworthy for both producers and consumers, justifying ample coverage by competent people.