'War' Casualties

. . . Preble County farmer faces ruin in pollution fight

The discovery of chemical contamination in a Preble County farmer's dairy herd suggests either a breakdown in or defects in procedures which should protect the public, and the virtual absence of protection for small businessmen, like the dairy farmer, who become casualties in the war against pollution.

It is important to state clearly that available information does not indicate that the amounts of the chemical contaminate (polychlorinated biphenyls — PCB) found in the milk from Loren A. Dillman's dairy herd is harmful to human beings. But chemists are wary because PCB tends to concentrate in animal tissues in a manner similar to DDT.

The state's continual testing of milk is an effective but not infallible safeguard against contamination reaching consumers. In the case of dairy farmer Loren Dillman, and other dairy farmers in the state, the testing system should have been augmented by a reliable warning system for all dairy farmers. Even to the point of employing the mass media for qualified public notification if no other satisfactory method could be found for getting immediate word to dairy farmers and milk processors.

It is difficult to determine how far the manufacturer's liability for his products should extend — though a damage suit filed against the Monsanto Chemical Co., the sole manufacturer of PCB, clarify this point. At any rate Monsanto is following the enlightened policy of warning all its customers to handle the compound with care.

Meanwhile, through no fault of his own, Dillman faces financial ruin. He not only is unable to market his milk, he apparently has no really acceptable way of disposing of it. On his own he tore down the silo whose paint was the source of his misfortune. But he risks further contamination of his fields by disposing of the debris from the silo and by dumping the milk.

The Dillman problem seems to be a public responsibility. It seems only just that the cost of protecting the environment and safeguarding the public be shared generally by society. A part of that cost is relieving the hardship of food suppliers like Dillman, or the small manufacturers who can't meet pollution control standards, or the working people whose jobs are lost in the dislocations occurring in the battle to protect the environment. These problems will grow more acute as the war against pollution intensifies. So far the burden is being carried by only a few.

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