The Bay City Times

10B Sunday, February 6, 1983

Disposal of useless, contaminated silos still worries Pigeon farmer

By KARL D. ALBRECHT
Times Writer

When the Michigan Department of Agriculture recently ordered farmers to quit storing cattle feed in 150 silos believed contaminated by cancer-causing PCB chemicals, the news made little difference to the dairy operation of Dale Schulz, 36, of 6980 Pigeon Road, Pigeon.

Schulz has been stuck with four PCB-contaminated silos he has been unable to use since 1974, when the problem was first discovered, and he has long since provided other storage to continue operations.

As is the case with other farmers with similar long-term problems, Schulz's main concerns now are:

• What possible effect long exposure to the PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls) has had upon him and his family;

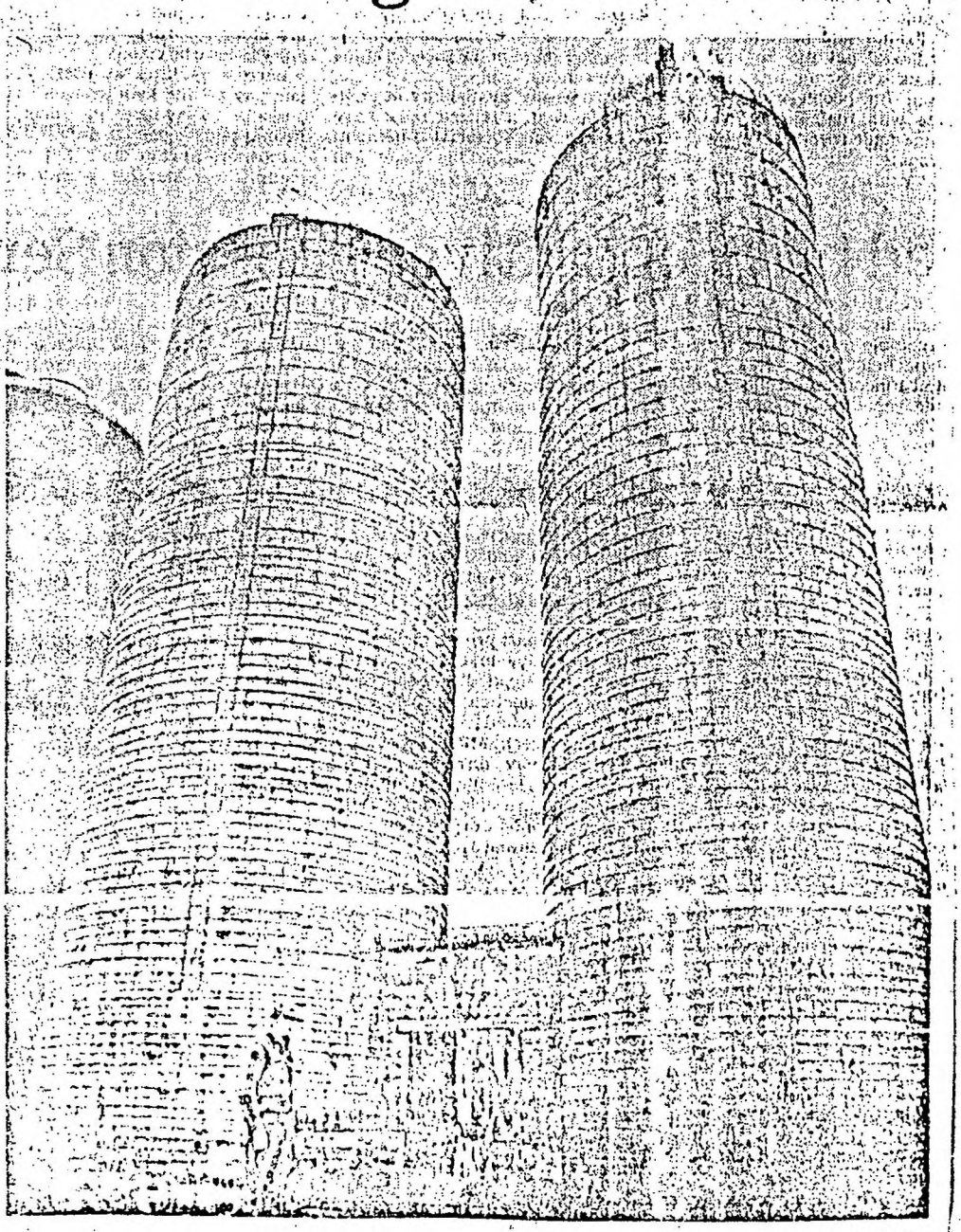
• How, when and where he can dispose of his contaminated silos;

• Who is going to pay for solving all these problems.

For others, such as Albert Braun of 4762 W. Fillon Road, Elkton Road, who lives a dozen miles away in Huron County, the problem is even worse. Despite his just-completed efforts to comply with all state safety regulations, his entire milking herd has been quarantined, and he has been denied the use of his lone silo.

The latest shutdown orders followed a two-year study by a Michigan Department of Agriculture team that found quantities of PCB's in silos of 3 percent of farms checked.

The results, and the order, were released by Burton Cardwell, coordinator of the MDA Toxic Substances and Emergencies division. Cardwell said tests are expected to be done by June on 10,000 to 12,000 farms. He expects that PCB will be found in about 300 of them, and adds that many of suspect silos are no longer in use.



LEONARD FALCE

Two of the four PCB-contaminated silos Schulz has been unable to use since 1974.

PCB-ARCH-EXT0377938

Cardwell said the defunct Michigan Silo Co., of Charlotte, used a varnish-like material containing PCB to coat the insides of more than 5,000 silos built in the state between 1941 and 1966. The material was also sold to farmers who coated their silos, and the PCB entered the food chain.

The coating contaminated the animal feed stored in the silos. When animals eat PCB-contaminated feed, they usually produced milk or meat containing PCB.

Federal standards prohibit the sale of meat containing more than 1.5 parts (PPM) per million, and milk with more than 3 ppm.

During subsequent inspections, some silos were found to have as much as 35,000 PPM on their floors, and 11,000 PPM was found in soil 75 feet away, Schulz wife, Chris, 35, the family statistician, said.

Schulz is particularly concerned about possible long-term threats to the health his wife and his four children, Janine, 11, Shawn, 10, Julie, 6 and Jill, 12 weeks.

About one year ago, Schulz told the Toxic Substance Control Commission that he has developed a pituitary tumor. His wife said the tumor was found to be benign, but he has to take medication. Also, she said, Janine still suffers from stomach ulcers and Shawn has hearing loss and other internal ear and nose problems. The younger children have no problems, she said.

She said she and Dale believe the problems were caused by PCB's in the milk from the farm the family drank until 1974.

"All I've had is a bad case of nerves," Chris Schulz said.

"I've been milking cows ever since I was a kid. I grew up on this farm with my dad, (William). He had a stroke a couple of years ago, and can only help occasionally now," Schulz said.

His farm comprises 600 acres of land, and he has a herd of 320 Holstein cows, 150 of which are "milkers." His brother, Ron, has 80 acres adjoining, but this acreage does not provide his total, or principal, income.

"The state told us in 1974 that we had to quit using our silos. Two of them were are Ron's place, where we had some young cattle, Schulz said."

This meant the family had to fall back upon a safe, well-sealed Harvestore silo, supplemented by a second similar silo in 1978, but mostly from a huge, outdoor bunker, a less than a perfect solution because a considerable amount of feed is lost each year to weather deterioration.

"It's costing us 20 percent of our storage per year," Schulz said.

He does not have any idea how much the problem is going to cost him before it is solved.

Schulz has been trying to determine an approximate figure since he retained Bad Axe attorney H. Dale Cubitt to sue the defunct Michigan Silo Co. He is also suing Monsanto Chemical Co., supplier of the material containing PCB used in the wall coating by Michigan Silo Co.

Schulz said he is not sure how much he will ever recover, but he intends to continue both his business operations and his fight to determine the cost of the damage and recover his losses.

"There's no place I can go," Schulz said.

He now produces 6,500 pounds of milk (756 gallons) per day, using his approved, safe feed, and he is not at all upset with the state for the actions it has taken.

"The milk inspectors have been pretty darn good to us," he said.

On the other hand, Albert Braun, and his son, Ed are rather less happy with denial of the use of their herd and silo. He feels that that no matter what he does is wrong.

He has a total herd of only 40 cows, of which 24 are milkers. They ordinarily provide about 30 percent of his total income at his 380-acre farm.

"What made me so mad about that silage thing is the state told me to line it (the silo) to seal it off this fall. I had it sandblasted and lined with fiberglass. This cost me $3,000 — more than the silo. I had to dig that out of a moldy sock," Braun said.

"I lined the silo during the first part of October. The last part of November, they came out and quarantined me, damn them." Braun said.

"The highest any of my cows (milk) ever had was 4.4 parts per million," he said. "I thought the quarantine was only going to cover nine, but they tagged them all," Braun said.

Upon reflection, he suspects his unexpected new problem may have been the result of haylage cleaned from the bottom of the silo, when it was being relined. If so, the high PCB levels in the milk should not last very long.

He said he has had to dump 20 to 30 gallons of milk per day since Dec. 7, which, he estimates, costs him $24-$26 per day.

Edwin D. Renkie, assistant toxic substances and emergencies coordinator fo the Michigan Department of Agriculture, briefly discussed the silo problem, and what is likely to be done to solve it.

"The solution inevitably will be the destruction of the silos. Coating is definitely out of the question at this time because of (the problem of) accumulating damage to the coating. It would be self-defeating to patch it up. Also, administratively, it would be hard to monitor damage."

"We're still trying to get a handle on what is the average contamination in silo materials. We have been testing scrapings," Renkie said.

He said an excess of 1.5 PMM has been found in the scrapings.

A literally large part of the problem is the size of the silos themselves. "These silos weigh 20-30 tons each. That's why we need a Michigan site for disposal," Renkie said. There is presently no such site available in Michigan that is approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Cardwell had earlier estimated that the cost of dismantling the silos and hauling them to other states could cost as much as $15 million — money which neither the state nor the farmers have.

However, both Cardwell and Renkie said the state is trying to get the EPA to relent a bit.

Who is going to pay for all this?

"I wish I knew. It is going to take some big bucks," Renkie said.



Dale Schulz, 36, worries about health of family. LEONARD FALCE

PCB-ARCH-EXT0377939