



A MODEST FARMER

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You must get rid of that wretched law, dear

When I ended a recent article by saying that the next thing the Government would want would be to rescind the law of supply and demand, I had my tongue in my cheek.

But Mavis thought I was serious and she got quite excited. She thinks that all economic laws were invented by “that wretched Eccles” as she calls him.

She is certain that it was Eccles’s evil influence that made me unpopular in the electorate. She still secretly hopes that, if only Eccles would go away, I might be able to make a political comeback.

And the desire for this has become stronger because there have been no offers forthcoming to make me Ambassador to Outer Mongolia.

Then Mavis got interested in the argument about meat prices, and when she heard someone say that the meat price was rising in response to the law of supply and demand, she was quick to pounce.

“You must get rid of that wretched law, dear,” she said. “Then the price of beef will come down again and you will be able to take all the credit.

“Then you could let it be known that you were available if your country needed you.”

Poor Mavis has never accepted the unpleasant fact there is nothing quite so dead as a retired politician.

There is a lot of nonsense being talked about the rise in beef prices and the phrase “rip-off” has had heavy usage lately.

But the fundamental reason why the price of beef has risen is that the supply of killable cattle has fallen.

There are many reasons for this and farmers know some of them all too well.

Fred has been lucky because he got rid of his cattle when he heard the wise ones at an Outlook Conference telling farmers that the price of beef was assured for years and years.

Long and bitter experience has taught Fred always to go against the tide. So all the time that beef prices have been so lamentably low Fred has been looking unbearably smug.

But the rest of us who have stuck to, or been stuck with, our cattle have been through hell in the past few years.

Cattle are nice friendly beasts when everything is going right, when they are lying around after having a great bellyful of grass. But when the sods get hungry they never lie down and rest, they just wander around, leaning on fences and bellowing at you when you go past.

And eat, you should see them eat. And the dearer the food, the hungrier they get.

So I came to hate my cattle during our recent drought, and they cost me a lot of money to keep. And now that we have had good rains and we know that we will be short of stock in two months, people go round abusing me because I will not sell my half fat cattle now, but will keep them till I can fatten them properly on grass.

City people have been buying the cheapest beef in the world for so long that they think they should be able to continue to do so.

Yet until now, if a beast brought \$200 in the sale yard, the farmer would receive about \$70 of this for keeping him for a couple of years, while the people who transported him, sold him, killed him, and then cut hi, up into little pieces during the last week he was on earth got \$130.

Now that the farmer is getting closer to \$90, people get angry.

People are now asking for an inquiry as to whether there has been a rip-off in meat prices.

People are always asking for an inquiry into something and then they wonder why the cost of government is so high.

Of course, there are times when people take advantage of a favourable supply and demand situation but, after all, isn't that what the capitalistic system is about?

And if it isn't to be the law of supply and demand that rations the cattle on to the market, then the Government would have to do it instead, and how would you like that?

And who is making all these rip-offs we hear so much about? It certainly isn't the farmer.

There are too many butchers going broke for that to be an easy crop.

Wholesalers are doing pretty well just now but there are a lot of times when they aren't. And producer groups always seem to lose money when they get into wholesaling.

The best way to handle the situation is to let the housewives sort it out. After all, they aren't forced to buy beef: there are a great many other meats from which to choose.

We don't want another great inquiry. Mavis and her mob would do it quicker, and cheaper too, if only the Government would let them get on with it.