Sugar Growers Air Gripes

WINDSOR, Colo. (AP) — If you think the current price of sugar is a ripoff, don’t take your gripe to a sugar farmer unless you’re ready to listen to his money problems, too.

The domestic farmers who grow sugar beets and sugar cane are the original source for nearly half the sugar consumed in the United States.

As greater worldwide demand and weather disasters around the globe push sugar prices far beyond levels of a year ago, the payments and potential payments to farmers are jumping up, too.

But sugar beet growers like Manuel Pineda and Jack Boege of this northern Colorado farm area will tell you that burgeoning prices for fuel, equipment and fertilizer are eating away at their seeming bonanza.

And for diversified farmers like these men, some of the sugar money is just an offset for their recent losses in the cattle business.

Fuel costs have doubled in the past year, pushing up the cost of operating tractors, harvesters and other implements in the $75,000 fleet of specialized equipment that Boegel uses on his 190 acres of sugar beets.

“Damned fertilizer,” Pineda grimaced at another expense.

“When we were a quarter of the way through this year, we were already up to all of last year’s fertilizer bill.”

Many in the sugar growing business say costs are changing so rapidly that growers’ traditional accounting-analysis figures can’t keep up. But they estimate it’s taking a market sugar price of about 30 cents a pound just to break even.

With sugar now past 50 cents a pound, that means good profits for farmers and processors. But it also means that year-ago sugar prices of 16 or 17 cents a pound aren’t likely to return.

Despite profits running as high as 20 times those of a year earlier, sugar processing firms say their previous earnings were so low that a big jump is not unconscionable.

They’ll have a chance to make their case to the government this week at hearings on sugar prices called in Washington by the Council on Wage and Price Stability.

They’re also expected to have their say at congressional hearings next week when the House Agriculture Committee inquires into soaring sugar prices.

In the wake of this year’s weather-devastated cane and beet crop, there seems no prospect for improved supplies until the next crop comes in next year.

Bigger supplies in relation to demand could ease prices.

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Ways to stretch sugar are listed for homemakers

In these days of high prices and shortages, homemakers want to know how to stretch a limited sugar supply.

“Americans normally consume a lot of sugar—about 100 pounds per year per person,” said Betty Lou Henry, foods and nutrition specialist with the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Service.

“We can actually improve our diets by substituting foods of higher nutritional value for the sugar we cut from our food intake,” she said.

Miss Henry gave some suggestions for stretching sugar.

“Substitute naturally sweet foods, such as oranges, pears, bananas and apples, for concentrated sweets, such as pies, cakes, cookies and candy.”

“Substitute other sweeteners, such as corn syrup and honey, for sugar in recipes,” she added.

“Corn syrup is about half as sweet as sugar. But its total substitution for sugar in a recipe could affect the texture of a delicate baked food; therefore, a convenient rule of thumb to follow is for each cup of sugar substitute one cup of corn syrup plus ¼ cup of sugar and reduce liquid called for in the recipe by three to four tablespoons,” Miss Henry explained.

The extension specialist pointed out that honey equals sugar in sweetness but added that in baked goods where texture is affected only ½ of the sugar should be replaced with honey.

“For each cup of sugar in the recipe,” she said, “substitute ½ cup honey plus ½ cup sugar. Decrease the liquid in the recipe by 3 ½ tablespoons and add ¼ teaspoon baking soda to counteract acids in the honey.”

In beverages and fruit desserts, Miss Henry said, one cup of honey may be substituted for each cup of sugar.

The food and nutrition specialist said that sugar can be reduced in sweet desserts (except cakes) ¼ to ½ without causing too many family complaints.

“However,” she added, “reducing sugar in desserts also reduces the weight of the product, so one must be satisfied with a lighter, smaller portion.”

“Cook cereals with prunes, raisins or dates and serve them without sugar,” she suggested.

A thrifty way to conserve on food and save on sugar is to save the syrups from canned fruits, the extension specialist said, and use them to sweeten other fruits, puddings, beverages or cereals.

“Be sure that all sugar in beverages is completely dissolved to get its full sweetness,” she said, adding that sugar made into a syrup will stretch farther than granular sugar.

“Using superfine sugar to replace granulated sugar in drinks has the benefit of dissolving more quickly and providing a sweet flavor with less sugar,” Miss Henry pointed out.

“If desired, superfine sugar can be made from granulated sugar by using the blender,” she said.

The food and nutrition specialist explained that fruits may be canned without sugar by packing them hot in their own juices or by adding boiling water. Jars should be processed in a boiling water bath to prevent spoilage, she said.

“If more sweetening is desired,” Miss Henry said, “it may be added when the fruit is served.”