Sugar Isn't That High

Retail sugar prices are skyrocketing and reports of huge profits by sugar companies are alarming, so the people are reacting and over-reacting. Reports that Great Western Sugar Co., had profits of 1,200 per cent this past year have people shaking their heads.

Housewives in Colorado have been attempting to organize a boycott of sugar and now supermarkets are joining in the effort to curtail sugar buying. Understandably, stores are concerned over panic buying and hoarding and the placing of limits on the amounts which can be purchased is a justifiable step. But we think the supermarkets should explain this as the reason for their actions, not printing signs which read: "Help fight inflation. Don't buy sugar."

If they are going to follow this approach, they shouldn't single out sugar for such action. They should include the many, many other grocery items which have skyrocketed in prices, perhaps more gradual than sugar, but have increased nevertheless.

Consider, for example, the price increase on margarine, on shortening, on some produce items, etc. The per pound prices of many items are caught up in the inflationary spiral and the supply and demand factors. It sure isn't limited to sugar.

Why didn't supermarkets put up "fight inflation" signs when meat prices were skyrocketing a year ago, or when eggs were so high you thought they all were laid by the goose with the ability to turn out gold.

Sugar currently is costing the housewife a high of $2.43 for five pounds locally. For our purposes, we increased it to $2.45 which, divided by five, means that sugar is costing 49 cents per pound. This is higher than normal, way higher. But in comparison to other food prices, 49 cents is still a bargain. The problem is that sugar has always been dirt cheap and has been used by supermarkets to draw in customers as sale items.

Now the trend has changed. Sugar prices are catching up with the high costs of other food items. Sugar refiners say increased worldwide demand and bad weather has hurt crops, causing the increases. This shouldn't be so hard to imagine, since it is a known fact that similar reasons have pushed grain prices to inflated levels.

But again, we feel the relative costs of sugar should be emphasized. It is generally considered by sugar experts that the consumption of sugar runs 100 pounds per capita, including not only the sugar used in the home but also the candy, the bakery goods, the soft drinks, etc., that a person consumes annually.

Therefore, a family of four would consume 400 pounds of sugar a year, and based on 49 cents per pound this would involve an expenditure of $196 per year. High? Yes, but it can be lowered by mom baking more cookies, cakes and pies at home instead of buying them at the supermarket, or by families cutting down on their soft drink consumption.

Supermarkets, too, could fight the inflated costs of sugar by curtailing their pushing of bakery goods, etc., and thus making more packaged sugar available for housewives. Or supermarkets could place limits on items which have a high sugar content, and on margarine, and on shortening, and....

We're living in "Sugar Valley U.S.A." and sugar prices are vital to our economy. And the same farmers and plant employees who raise sugar beets and process them have to buy their sugar in the supermarkets. We would like to see sugar prices lower, yet enable the beet farmers to enjoy a respectable income. But we also would like to see prices of other items lower, too.

If housewives are truly angered over sugar prices, they have it within their power to do something about it. They can return to the oven and start baking their own cookies, pies and cakes. Besides, as all husbands and children will tell you, the ones made by mom are tastier anyway.