

Marketers: product packaging aims to draw shoppers' eyes

By Cathy Higgins

The goal of supermarket merchandising is more to attract the customer's attention rather than inducing shoppers to buy unwanted items, according to three Lincoln merchandising specialists.

Don Parente, University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor of Journalism, said the location and packaging of a product is important to its salability.

"The important thing is to give people what they want and put it (the product) where they can find it," Parente said. He added that demand items are placed at eye level and impulse or related items shelved close by.

"Many people feel that marketing people are mysteriously tricking customers into buying unwanted products," he said. "Advertising is basic and straightforward in a productive way."

DENNIS BISSELO, merchandising manager of Flemings Food Co. of Nebraska, said the most important function of arrangement is to create a smooth movement from item to item.

"Some products are placed to induce customers into buying certain items," he said, "but this is a common concept. We position income items next to demand items, but they are related in some way or another."

Robert Steinberger, O Street Hinky Dinky manager, said it is impossible to arrange demand items in specific aisles in his store.

"We carry about 10,000 products so we can't have any special merchandising," he said. "What is a demand item to one person is an impulse item to the next."

Steinberger added that the seasonal flow of money has an effect on what people buy.

"We are now merchandising budget products or less expensive products because money is tight this time of year," he said. "Soon we'll start merchandising spring-type merchandise, like garden seeds and fresh vegetables."

All three agreed that packaging plays a major role in attracting customers.

tain products," Parente said. "The color of a package is important because people like attractive things."

"We are more concerned that a person is ignoring a product than trying to manipulate them into buying a certain item," he said. He added that different colors attract buyers in different areas.

"Red does well in Nebraska, Red China and the Soviet Union. Green does well in the United States but not in southeast Asia where it is associated with the jungle and disease," he said.

The basic theory is to use packaging to help shoppers identify the brand, Parente said.

Steinberger said the most difficult aspect of his job is to create a reliable atmosphere.

"You gain business by establishing honesty with people," he said. "People need to know that we are offering them a variety of products at the lowest prices possible."



Photo by Bob Pearson

An example of a supermarket display where related items are shelved close to each other.

"PACKAGING IS very important in cer-

Farm policy 'mini-course' causes student to transfer opinions

By Val Swinton

Curt Alan Brown has just completed a three week course on farm policy and the federal government. He didn't like the teachers and he thought the campus was lousy, but some of the lessons he learned he'll remember for the rest of his life.

The course wasn't sponsored by UNL, nor was it held in Lincoln or Omaha. The campus was the nation's capital and the sponsor was the American Agriculture Movement. Curt returned this week from the AAM's tractorcade to Washington, D.C.

Brown, a UNL business major, was not impressed with the city, the politicians, the news media or the police. He said he thought the people were prejudiced against the farmers; the media and police overreacted to most of the incidents involving the AAM.

"My impression of D.C.?" he asked. "I wish it would blow away."

Brown has a lot of memories of his trip to Washington D.C. He said he remembers, for example, four policemen hovered over a farmer after they had dragged him off his tractor and beat him with billy clubs. Or a fifth policeman trying to drag a farmer's wife off the tractor, and how he beat a Nebraska woman with his club as she tried to stop him.

HE SAID HE remembers a farmer who was taken to a hospital after police sprayed enough teargas in his tractor cab to disperse a large mob. Brown said he heard later that the farmer had lost his sight in one eye, and doctors weren't sure yet if they could save the other eye.

Brown also remembers a SWAT officer driving a four-wheel drive vehicle.

"His job was to make us do something wrong," Brown said. "If you were Iranians going into that place, the police would have protected you. But not Americans."

Brown also said he thought it was funny that the news media in Washington would show up at a certain point along the street just before trouble developed. And, he insists, it wasn't the farmer that tipped them off about potential trouble.

"The press back there was very bad," he said. "They just picked up on the bad things."

The UNL sophomore gave as an example the damage the farmers allegedly caused to Capital Mall. It was estimated at about \$2 million, according to the morning papers.

"A better estimate of that might be \$10,000," he said.

BUT DESPITE the bad memories, Brown insists the tractorcade helped the farmers.

"We know the tractorcade definitely helped us," he said. "It gave us press and everything. It gave attention to the problems that we have."

But Brown admits he doesn't know what effect the tractorcade will have on the politicians.

"I don't know what the government is going to do. They all agree there is a problem and something has to be done," he said, but added, "Most of them don't even know where their food is coming from."

What the AAM is demanding is that farm prices be raised to 90 percent of "parity", a measure of prosperity intended to keep the price of farm commodities in line with rising inflation. But to do so requires government subsidies, and to combat inflation, the government is tightening its belt and reducing those subsidies.

What also is hurting farmers like Brown and his father Eldon is the fact that most farmers are thriving. Total farm income soared 40 percent in 1978, totalling \$28 billion, the second highest in history. The price of milk, hogs and cattle all increased last year, and the trend appears to be continuing.

BUT THOSE figures have little significance to the Browns, who farm 2,000 acres of wheat in Banner County. Brown said the price of wheat now is \$2.69 a bushel, the same price as in 1948. He added that it's pretty hard to buy supplies and equipment at 1978 prices when you are getting 1948 prices for your crops.

Curt said that he and his father have not had a profitable year since 1974.

"When you haven't made any money in that amount of time, it draws on you pretty hard," he said.

When asked why the Browns don't invest in livestock and take advantage of the high prices, Curt pointed out that a lot of farmers bought more land in 1974 when wheat prices were soaring and then the bottom fell out of the market. He said they don't want to take that gamble with livestock.

The USDA is no help, he said.

"The USDA will come out with a report of a bumper crop of wheat in the fall," he said. "Then that will drop the price."

Although much of the wrath of the AAM appeared to be aimed at U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland during the tractorcade, Brown said he doesn't feel Bergland is to blame.

"MY IMPRESSION of Bergland, from what our congressmen tell us, is he's really a nice man, (and) it just isn't like him to be this way," Brown said. "He's a puppet of President Carter. He has no control over the situation. He has to be loyal to his paycheck."

And Brown is even more specific as to who the farmers must deal with if they are going to win their battle for greater government subsidies.

"The problem of the farmer is solely Carter's dealing," he said. "So Carter is the man we're fighting."

"But hell," he continued, "he's running all over the world. He's more concerned with other countries than he is with the United States."

The UNL student says he feels the fight in Congress should be concentrated in the House of Representatives.

"The Senate is more sympathetic than the House," he said. "New York and Los Angeles representatives just have no idea at all what it costs to raise things."

Brown, a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity, dropped out of school this semester so he could go to Washington D.C. But he insists that his education in Washington was equal to any one semester in school.

"I learned more out of this past month and a half than any length of time in school," he said. "I have no faith in the national government at all."