

TAHLEQUAH - where business is a pleasure

The sun had just gone down and the threat of rain hung over our heads as we boarded the van for the trip to the quarterly co-op federation meeting on April 7. Six-plus hours later we found ourselves outside of Tahlequah (40 miles northeast of "Muskogee Oklahoma, U.S.A.") at the top of a rocky lane we didn't think the van could get back up if it ever got down. So we pitched a tent and bedded down and woke early the next morning to spring in Oklahoma. The dogwood, redbud, and wildflowers were in bloom in the valley where we met with representatives from co-ops in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Kansas, and Missouri.



The meeting opened with a report from the trucking collective which picks up food for the federation warehouse and delivers food to member co-ops. The women of the collective felt they needed the trust, support, and constructive criticism of an exclusively women's group and so the trucking collective has become a women's collective for the time being. The decision-making process

was difficult and painful but everyone directly involved now seems to be satisfied with the outcome. Although a few dissenting opinions were heard, those present at the meeting endorsed the trucking collective's decision.

Up until now, the truckers collected \$.05/# from individual co-ops upon delivery of their orders. A new proposal approved at this meeting will now include the cost of freight in the cost charged by the warehouse and the warehouse will pay the trucking collective for freight in one lump sum. The new proposal will also change the basis of the freight charge. As mentioned above, in the past freight has been figured as a cost per pound delivered. Under the new proposal, freight will be figured as a percentage of the value of the item delivered. As a result, low-priced staple foods will see a slight decrease in cost while higher priced luxury items (like nuts and dried fruits) will increase in price slightly. Other wholesale food distributors use this method of freight charge. A consequence of the warehouse not using this method was that co-ops would order staple food items from commercial distributors because they could get them cheaper while relying on the warehouse for luxury items. Hopefully this new proposal will allow co-ops to stop "shopping around" and to put their money where their interest truly lies.

Everytime a member co-op receives an order from the warehouse, it pays a 5% surcharge. This surcharge becomes a loan from that co-op to the warehouse so that the warehouse can grow along with its member co-ops. The warehouse can stock more food as the co-ops' orders increase. Once the amount accumulated in a co-op's surcharge account equals its average monthly order, the co-op can stop paying the surcharge. It was proposed that the surcharge be eliminated, that the warehouse begin to pay back the surcharge loans to member co-ops, and that



a 2% capitalization charge be included in the cost of warehouse items to take the place of the surcharge and give the warehouse money to grow on. Such a proposal would raise the price of warehouse food and eliminate co-ops' direct monetary interest in and commitment to the warehouse. While many co-ops favored the idea, more discussion was obviously necessary. So the surcharge will be discussed more at the regional meetings in July and a decision will be made at the next federation meeting in October.

The warehouse collective requested that a steering committee be formed to help formulate long term goals for the warehouse and the federation. It was proposed that each region select a representative at the next regional meeting who would meet in Fayetteville with the warehouse collective and other regional representatives prior to the next federation meeting. This steering committee would at its first meeting establish its responsibilities, prepare the agenda for

the federation meeting, and begin to discuss the potential of our federation.

The weekend wasn't all business, however. The food provided by the folks of Tahlequah was delicious and filling. Wandering around the wooded hills and shallow streams was restful and invigorating. Music and conversation abounded. Two films were shown on Saturday night - "Microbes to Man: The Story of a Prairie Farm" and "Farming is Farming" -- which reminded us why we continue to struggle to provide low-cost, nutritious, ecologically grown food, that we are not alone in this struggle, and that progress is being made. And we all tried to make sure that the valley had a few less ticks when we left than it had when we arrived.

It will be fall before we all meet again. In the meantime, Kansas co-ops will hold a hot regional meeting in Manhattan in July. Y'all come!

CO-OP HERB GARDEN

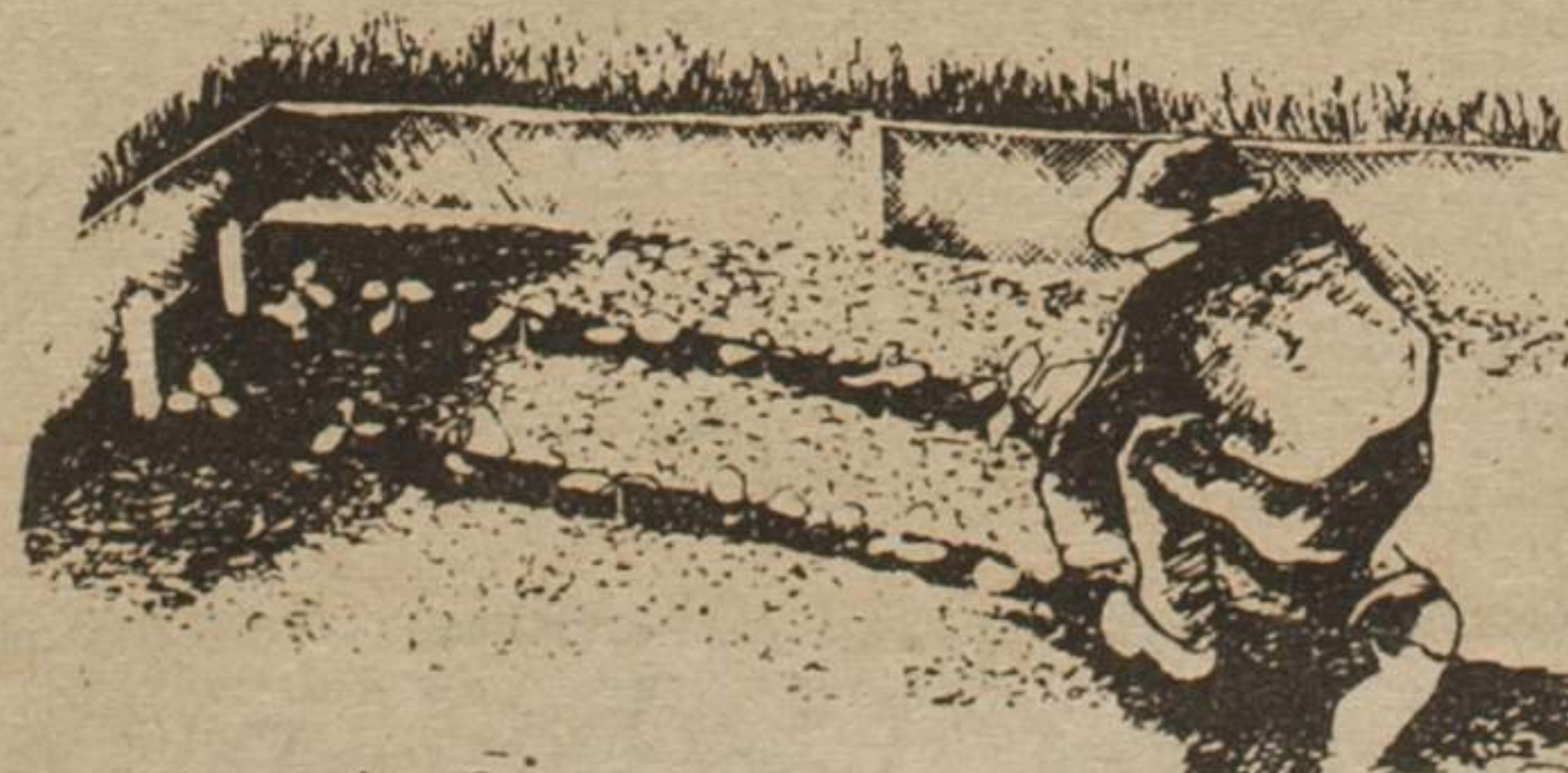
By Barbara Bowerman



The Herb Garden Committee has been formed to develop the land behind Verbena Bakery and will need all the work-power we can muster. An herb garden will not only supply the Co-op with teas and spices grown on home territory, but will also exist as a realm of esthetic delight for those who pause to linger and enjoy.

Previously the land was the site of raised worm beds and a tomato garden. Today it houses two compost piles along with assorted debris. The rubble will be scavenged and cleared given a good clean-up turn-out on May 13 and 14. The worm bed structures will be used for raised beds in which the garden will be planted in symmetrical design. The compost piles will, in the near future, provide dark humus to enrich the

depleted sub-soil now bared to the surface. Non-conforming zoning regulations restrict the co-op from building structural additions and from land use deviating from its past history. An herb garden will conform to zoning restrictions.



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The most intense work effort will be required within the next month. The committee is making a plea for its cause. We need bricks, stones, shovels, wheelbarrels, and trucks. We also need a good source of manure and plenty of shoulder muscle. Check the work team bulletin board for time of the next garden committee meeting or call Mary Pat Scheurich at 841-6286 or 841-5343.

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