

Lancaster Farming

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Ceiling Effect Seen Uncertain

President Nixon's meat price ceiling has caused a few ripples in local agricultural circles, but no waves. This is the feeling we got in a Friday morning LANCASTER FARMING survey of the county's livestock industry.

The President's Thursday evening statement is seen largely as a political gambit. In effect, the administration has frozen meat prices at an historic high. Even without the threat of national consumer boycotts, there is some downward pressure on meat prices. If prices go down over the short run, the administration stands to reap some glory. If they stay at their present level, the administration could still construe its move as a successful battle in the war against inflation.

Retail and wholesale meat prices are to go no higher than the average prices for the past 30 days, according to the presidential order. Most farmers locally would be happy to have the market prices they've been enjoying for the past month. Both hogs and beef cattle hit record highs on area auctions within that period.

Harold Esbenshade, a Mount Joy beef farmer, said he didn't think the ceiling would greatly affect farmers right away. He feels the President's move was designed to

quiet down the clamoring of consumer groups for lower meat prices.

Esbenshade noted that prices for both beef and pork have started down, and feed costs have been easing up somewhat in recent weeks as well. He feels that most farmers will be able to live with the prices they've been getting on livestock auctions the past month.

Richard Proether, from the Pennsylvania Farmers Association office in Harrisburg, said his organization opposed, in principal, price controls on raw agricultural products. The Nixon ceiling was not, in theory, such a control since it dealt only with retail and wholesale prices. In practice, however, it couldn't help but affect the price the farmer gets. Proether said it was impossible to gauge the influence the ceiling will have on farm prices. He also felt the move was motivated largely by an attempt to appease vocal consumer groups.

Across the state, consumer groups seemed to be viewing the President's action largely with contempt. "Too little, too late," was the typical comment of one consumer activist in Philadelphia. Most of the consumer groups are still planning to participate in a nationwide meat boycott in the weeks ahead.

Oren Lee Staley, leader of a national farmer group, has called on farmers to reply to the boycotters by holding their animals off the market.

These threats and counter-threats have added a considerable measure of uncertainty to livestock markets here and across the nation. William McCoy, president of the Lancaster Stockyards, said the short-term meat situation has become an emotional, rather than a supply and demand, issue. He added that knowledgeable people in the meat industry were not surprised at all by the President's action.

Livestock prices were on a roller coaster this week. Locally liveweight hogs hit a bottom price of 31c per pound, but by week's end, hogs were selling again at the 40c mark. Cattle were down \$5 from two weeks ago, and hogs were down about the same.

McCoy said he'd never seen anything like the wild swings in the recent livestock market. He noted that the market should be strong in coming months, because supplies are short. An especially acute shortage should hit around May and June, he said, when the yearlings that were

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Funk Tells LEAF Meet . . .

Farms - Going but not Gone

"Lancaster County is losing farmland at the rate of 8000 acres a year," Amos Funk told a meeting of the Lancaster Environmental Action Federation (LEAF) on Wednesday night at Franklin and Marshall College. "From 1954 to 1964, we were losing farms at the rate of just 4000 acres a year. If the rate of loss doubles again, we won't have any farms left in 30 years."

Funk had been invited as a farm representative to address the gathering of LEAF's land use task force. Also speaking were Anthony Perella, from the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce, and Donovan Smith, representing the local tourist industry.

Funk noted that Lancaster County contains a total of 604,000 acres. Of this, some 440,000 acres, or almost 70 percent of the total land area, is devoted to agriculture. Some 76 percent of the county's farmland has class

one, two or three soil. Across the state, farms with class one, two or three soils average only 38 percent.

In addition to soil productivity, Funk said there are other factors which bode well for the future of farming in the county. The importance of agriculture to the local economy is one of them. The county produces some 12 percent of the state's total agricultural output. The average age of the Lancaster County farmer is younger than most - 46.5 years, as opposed to the mid-fifties in many other parts of the state.

With inadequate planning, or poor planning, though, farming here could disappear, Funk pointed out. He noted one horrible example, that of Santa Clara County, California. That region was formerly one of the finest farming areas in the country. The Santa Clara Chamber of Commerce, however, promoted the

area as an ideal site for manufacturing. Within 20 years, over 800,000 people moved into the county. The demand and the cost for services far outstripped the ability to install and pay for them. Santa Clara County is now deeply in debt, there's very little open space, and the citizens are disgruntled.

It could happen in Lancaster County, Funk said he and others are working to keep it from happening here. One step that's been taken jointly by Lancaster County Conservation District and the County Planning Commission was the preparation of an overall plan for maintaining open space within the county.

This plan calls for the establishment of 10 prime agricultural areas within the county, comprising some 300,000 acres of top quality farmlands. The plan also calls for the establishment of 16,000 acres of

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Jesse G. Balmer, (right) Lititz R4, was one of the local dairymen honored Thursday at Pennfield Corporation's annual dairy awards banquet. He's shown receiving a trophy from Robert Gregory, Pennfield's dairy and livestock marketing manager. (See "Feed Cost", p. 12)



This flock of tourists, rumored to be from New Jersey, descended on a freshly plowed field outside Bird-in-Hand on Thursday afternoon. Like many visitors to the county, these sea gulls could be heard squawking from

quite a distance. Unlike most of their earthbound brethren, though, the birds fled at the approach of a native.

Lancaster Farming Photo