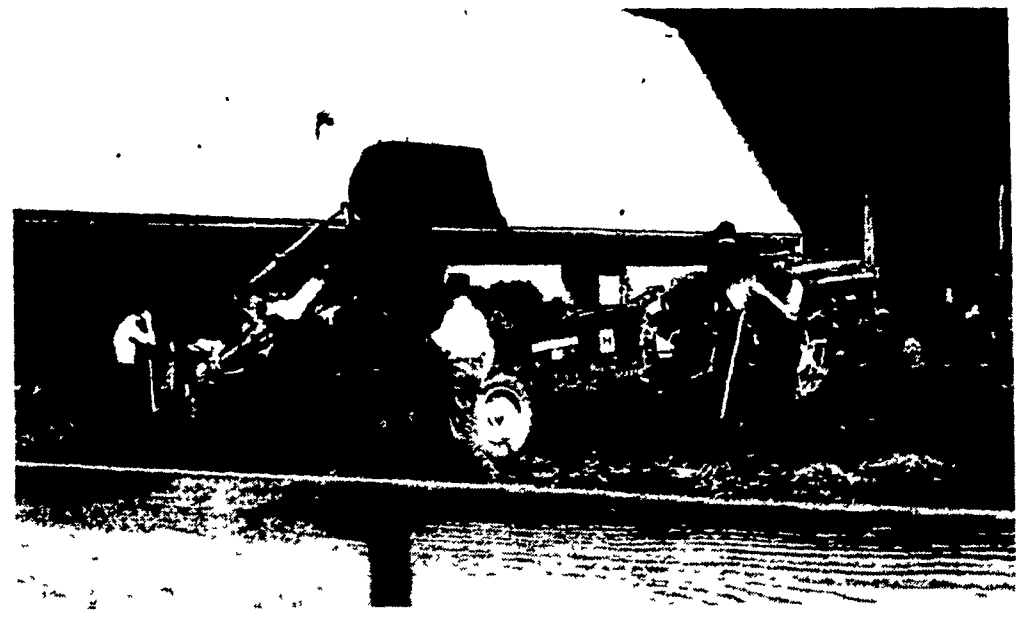
Lancaster Farming

Vol. 19 No. 24 | Lancaster Farming, Saturday, April 27, 1974 | $2.00 Per Year



Warwick Township farmers and their sons load manure onto a spreader at the farm of one of their neighbors, Joe Martin, Millway Road, whose back injury kept him from his spring plowing.

Martin's Neighbors Pitch In

Once again, Lancaster County farmers have come to the aid of a disabled fellow-farmer, joining troops-in this case, tractors-to do his spring plowing for him.

About six week ago, Joe Martin, a team farmer in Warwick Township, fractured his back when he fell from a farm wagon. Home from the hospital just barely a week, starting the long road to recovery, he was faced with the enormous job of a 90-acre farm at spring plowing and planting time. Of his 12 children, only a few are old enough to handle the heavy labors of plowing, harrowing, removing stones, and spreading manure.

On Tuesday morning, the Martin corn and tobacco fields that run along Millway Road were filled with a caravan of tractors and plows, manned by more than a dozen of Martin's neighbors, who had given up a precious day of work on their own farms to come to Martin's aid.

In the cow barn, farmers and their sons cleaned out tons of manure, loading it into spreaders. Eight tractors moved back and forth across the corn and tobacco fields, preparing the land for planting. Three, four, and five bottom plows paraded in picturesque maneuvers back and forth across the wide expanse of fields that surround the Martin farmhouse. The men worked all morning and into the afternoon harrowing the land, removing the stones.

In the Martin's farmhouse kitchen, wives of the workers gave Mrs. Martin and her daughters a hand preparing an enormous dinner for the men. The kitchen table and counter were filled with homemade breads and pies, salads, and meats, all a labor for a fellow family in need.

"I couldn't possibly name all the people who turned out to help," said Allen Balmer, who "captained" the community effort to help the Martins. "They came from all around, bringing their equipment with them. When it's time to plant, we'll be here to help with that, too," he said.

Several of the farmers brought four-bottom plows, one brought a five-bottom plow, several other brought three-bottom plows. For all of them, it meant a day lost on their own farms. But all took their labors in stride, full of good cheer as they went about their heavy tasks, knowing that if they were in a similar predicament, they, too, would receive the helping hands of their neighbors.

What greater love can a man show? A visit to the Martin farm on Tuesday morning would have been an inspiration to anyone who ever doubted the realities of friendship.

House to Weigh Farm Tax Bill Amendments

There's a good chance that a farmland assessment bill will finally be passed by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives as early as Tuesday. While the measure will still have to go before the state Senate, it's not likely the Senators will work on the bill for a year like the House did. The bill could be ready for Governor Shapp's signature by June.

House Bill 1056, the Farmland Assessment Act, had its genesis last May when Pennsylvania voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment allowing preferential tax treatment for farmland. Armed with the voters' mandate, Representative Francis Kennedy, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, scheduled public hearings throughout the state.

There are two basic provisions in the bill, one for a tax rollback and one for land splitoffs. In order to get a tax break, farmers must agree to keep their land in agriculture for a specified number of years. The agreement is strictly voluntary, but if a farmer signs it and later breaks it by selling his property to a developer or other non-farm buyer, then the farmer must pay a penalty. This penalty will be equal to the tax dollars not paid because of the preferential assessment plus interest for a certain number of years.

The splitoff provision spells out the manner in which farmers may or may not sell small parcels of land without jeopardizing their preferential tax status. Unlimited splitoffs would allow a farmer to sell as much or as little land as he wanted without any penalty. Such a provision would probably thwart the intention of the bill because it would allow land speculators to reap windfall profits at the expense of the state's taxpayers. A strict prohibition

[Continued on Page 16]

In This Issue

FARM TRENDS

by Dick Wanner

Newspaper farm editors from all over America, but mostly from the Midwest, met this week in Washington, D.C., to catch up on the latest doings in government agriculture and to trade ideas about communicating with farmers and representing farm interests. Lancaster Farming, in the person of editor Dick Wanner, was at the three-day meeting. Presented here are some of the meeting highlights.

Energy - Conserve, Conserve

John C. Sawhill, newly appointed head of the Federal Energy Office, said his office has been sensitive to the special needs of farmers in the energy crisis. He said they've done a number of things in an effort to see that farmers get all the fuel they need for plowing, planting and harvesting. On the natural gas, and related fertilizer shortage, Sawhill told the farm editors:

"I know your readers have questions about the

[Continued on Page 17]

Organic farmer Paul Hartz produced about 80 organically fed steers last year. He sells nearly all of his output directly to consumers.

Organic Farmer Tells Successes, Problems

Mention organic farmers or consumers to many in the agricultural community, and you'll conjure up visions of radical freaks intent on sending the whole world back to the days of homespun cloth and horse plowed fields. While this characterization may fit at least some members of the organic movement, it does not apply at all to Paul Hartz, president of the Pennsylvania Organic Farmers and Consumers Organization.

Hartz is a commerical farmer with 150 acres of cropland near Morgantown. He raises about 80 steers a year and market them as organic beef. He grows 70 acres of corn, 30 to 40 acres of soybeans and 10 acres of wheat, much of which he sells as whole grain wheat flour. Hartz is that rarity in the organic food business, a large-scale commercial producer. He is a quiet-spoken supporter of organic farming methods, but is the first to concede that there are problems with those methods.

"I switched to organic farming in 1960," Hartz said one recent morning in his living room. "Until then I was heavy on chemicals. I was raised that way and believed it was the only way. I used lots of weed killers and chemical fertilizers. But then I began to feel that there was a general decline. There were more animal health problems. It began taking more and more fertilizer to do the same job. So I switched over."

The change wasn't without its problems. "It was terrible at first," Hartz said. "I had weed and insect problems you wouldn't believe. The first few years are really hard, and that keeps a lot of farmers from switching. If we could only find a quicker way of changing, I think we'd have a lot more organic farmers."

A major problem, Hartz feels, is that there's very little research being done on farming without chemicals. "Farming is a unique industry," he said, "because we don't do our own

[Continued on Page 8]