

Property

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they don't want that right interfered with.

James Humphreville, a Lancaster geologist and past president of the Conestoga Valley Association, asked Herr how a farmer's individual property rights - his right to sell his land if he wants to - can be balanced against public pressure for open space preservation.

"That is the crux of the problem," Herr replied. "And I can't answer it. Farmers do feel a great deal of attachment to their land. They want to stay on it. They simply don't want others to tell them what to do with their security."

Herr is chairman of the vocation department at Garden Spot High School and lives on a small farm in Narvon. Other panelists were Amos Funk, Millersville vegetable

producer and well-known conservationist, John R. Ahfeld, chairman of the Lancaster County Planning Commission, and John W. Aungst, Jr., president of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County.

The principal speaker for the evening was Cornelius W. Heine, chief of the historic and architectural surveys for the Department of Interior's National Park Service.

Heine spoke at length about the natural beauty and agricultural wealth of Lancaster County, and said that at least two similar areas in the country have been recognized by the Department of Interior as areas eminently worthy of preservation. Heine praised Lancaster County's farmers for their stewardship of the

soil, and concluded by saying, "America's survival depends on a strong agricultural system. People who work in government must be made to realize that farming is just as important - maybe more so - than industrial expansion."

Amos Funk, in his remarks, pointed out that the county has an area of 604,000 acres, 430,000 of which is in farmland. "But we're losing this farmland at the rate of about 8000 acres a year. In 1973, 3300 acres were developed, and another 4500 acres were bought by speculators who took that land out of production."

Funk noted that this could be an especially tragic loss in Lancaster County, which accounts for 17 percent of Pennsylvania's farm production. "We can do so well here because 76 percent of our land is in Class 1, 2 or 3 farmland. The other counties in the state only average 38 percent. Sure, we know we're going to get more people in the county, and

they have to somewhere. But we have a lot of level land suitable for development that isn't good for farming. That's where we ought to be developing."

John Ahlfeld told the audience that the Lancaster County Planning Commission was working on a comprehensive land use plan for the county, and that one of the objectives of the plan was the preservation of agricultural land. He agreed with Funk that there was ample room for development without encroaching on top-quality farmland. "We can guide development away from the areas that should stay in farms or open space. If there are no sewers or highway interchanges in open areas, development pressures are decreased. We can use tax relief measures to keep farmers on the land. We can buy development rights. And we can create historical districts in agricultural areas. We don't have to sit back and watch our farms and open space

disappear."

After the meeting, Paul Paes, chairman of the Lancaster County Commissioners, told Lancaster Farming that the job of preserving the county's rural character was a job that needed the cooperation of the commissioners, the county planning commission and all the municipalities within the county.

"As commissioners," he said, "we're interested in preserving open space, and that's one of the things we're doing with the county park. We might also consider buying property rights. We can't do anything with tax easements, though, because that would amount to preferential assessment, and that is illegal under present Pennsylvania law."

Paes noted that money for purchasing development rights could come from federal revenue sharing funds. A farmer who sells his development rights to a government body would normally guarantee not to

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Gold emblem honors went to Jim Southard, Westfield in the livestock judging competition with bronze honors going to Jay Bomgardner of Annville.

In the ag mechanization judging medal honors went to James Weter, Knox, with Mark Meyers of Derry and John Swartzentruber of Pottstown receiving silver medals.

sell his land for development. The land could, however, still be sold for farming. For giving up his right to sell for development, the farmer would normally be compensated by a payment equal to the difference between the value of his land as farmland, and the potential value for development.

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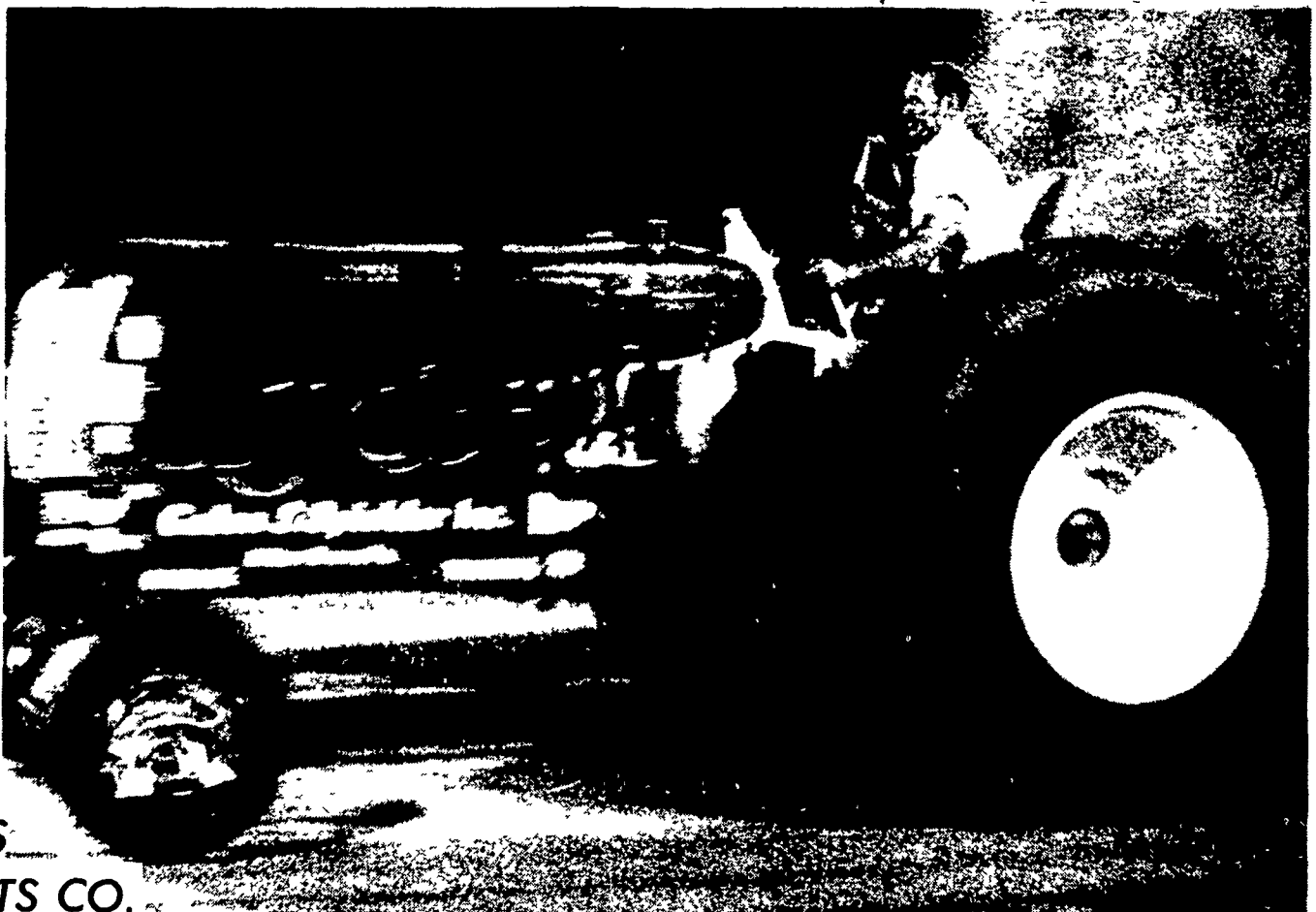
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