

"Mini-farmer" Hopes To Start Co-op Here

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those people worked. We talked about getting feed, raising crops, where to find a good vet, or good used equipment."

That meeting, Erb said, opened his eyes to the potential for a cooperative organization for mini-farmers. The first public meeting of the infant organization will be held at 8:00 p.m., Friday, March 21, at the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant in Lancaster, Erb said. "We hope all the mini-farmers in Lancaster County can be there. We've already contacted a lot of people we thought might be interested, and so far, nobody's said they won't come." More information about the meeting can be had by calling the Erbs at 717-872-6272.

What, exactly, is a mini-farmer, we asked Erb. "There's no official definition," he replied, "but I think of a mini-farmer as someone with a few acres who's farming more for self-sufficiency and fun than profit. We're not against farming for a profit, but there are other cooperatives for those farmers."

"You know, living out here has been really enjoyable. Our neighbors have helped us tremendously. Like last fall, we butchered two steers. We didn't know when the steers were ready to go to the butcher shop. One of our neighbors had to tell us they were ready. We had to learn a lot about farming, and they've been a big help. There's a kind of rural attitude - neighbors helping neighbors - that you just

don't find in town."

Neighbors helping neighbors is, in fact, one of the guiding principles behind the co-op which the Erbs hope to get off the ground. Members would both get and give assistance in buying, selling and labor. Some of the objectives which the Erbs hope to propose at the March 21 meeting are:

- The purchase of bulk quantities of hay, grain and other livestock feeds. Also discussion groups to find out just what kinds and amounts of feed would be best to buy.
- Equipment sharing among members. Items like balers and post hole diggers for which mini-farmers might have occasional use could be purchased as a group and shared by all as needed.

- Labor banks. Erb feels cooperative members should be able to contribute hours of work to help other members with big chores, like building a barn, clearing a woodlot, constructing a pond. Hours worked would be recorded, and when a contributor needed help for one of his mini-farm projects, he could make a "withdrawal" from the labor bank in the form of time and muscle from his fellow cooperators. Erb said the labor bank, if it worked, would be ideal for vacationing mini-farmers, who could go away for a week or two and know that their fields and livestock were being watched over by another co-op member.

- A monthly newsletter is planned for all members.
- Ladies auxiliary. Mrs. Erb said this would be more like a garden cooperative to order bulk quantities of things like seeds, young plants and household items.

Both Erbs feel that there could be a lot more people moving to the country if they had more encouragement, and if they could talk to people who'd already lived through the experience.

One problem is finding land. Erb said he looked for a place for eight years before something came along that he wanted and could afford. Housing can be another stumbling block. The Erb home today is attractive and comfortable, but it took nine months of hard work, before the move, to make it that way. Erb works as an advertising representative for Lancaster Newspapers. Every day after work, for nine long months, Erb left the office and went to the farm house. He uncovered the old, square logs, some with the original white wash. He scraped floors, he tore down walls, he washed and painted and rewired. Much of the work was done by contractors, but much more was done by the Erbs.

"Everybody told us at first that the only thing to do was tear down the house and start over," Mrs. Erb said as she sipped coffee in the comfortable, attractive kitchen that was formerly two small rooms. "I'm glad we didn't."

Having found the land, having solved their housing problems, the Erbs and their two daughters, 7-year-old Lee and 5-year-old Pat, began their adventure in country living.

They ripped a jungle of raspberry bushes from a pasture. They cleared away 25 years of accumulated debris and trash from the barnyard. They cleared brush and trees out of neglected, once-tillable fields. It was hard work. "But for me, getting on the tractor at the end of the day isn't really work," Erb said. "It's a release. I like to do it."

The Erbs have a five-year-plan for their property, and right now they feel they're about two years ahead of schedule. Their chickens are providing them with eggs ("But, they'd be cheaper at the store," Erb said), they're eating their own beef, they're thinking about milking their goats, and they've got a freezer and a pantry full of home grown vegetables.

"Whatever you can do with tomatoes, I've done it," Mrs. Erb said. "Stewed tomatoes, catsup, tomato paste, tomato

juice, relish . . ." Last year they even sold some of their sweet corn. Erb said they sold 800 dozen ears of corn - at 14 ears to the dozen - for 50-cents a dozen. It was all hand harvested, as was the field corn.

There is nothing in the five-year plan that calls for making a profit from their farming operation. The Erbs are working only for a way of life and for a measure of self-sufficiency. They hope their cooperative idea catches on, so they can help and en-

courage more people to follow their lead.

"We like this way of life," Erb said, "and we think mini-farmers like us can help preserve much of the farmland around cities and towns. We can help keep the developers out of the country. I've been asked again and again if I'd like to sell off some of my road frontage. I could use the money, sure, but I'm not going to sell. This way of life is too important for me to sell bits and pieces of it."



MARCH 3-9, 1975

It's time for that stir in the forest.

Are your grapevines pruned? . . . Stalin died March 5, 1953 . . . Last quarter of the moon March 4 . . . Maple sap running now . . . Average length of days for week, 11 hours, 23 minutes . . . Banks closed March 3, 1933 . . . Nine-tailed sea monster spotted off Oregon March 4, 1930 . . . Town meetings begin . . . Patrols looking for dangerous icebergs start out this week . . . He that is warm thinks all are so.



Ask the Old Farmer: I purchased a device to roll newspapers into logs for the fireplace, but the instructions that came with the gadget called for the rolled newspapers to be impregnated with kerosene. That way, if you keep one in your wood basket,

your living room smells of kerosene. C. L. Cleveland. Yes, you can burn rolled newspapers without putting anything on them, if you do not roll them up too tightly. We have burned them for years, without kerosene, or a gizmo to roll them.

Home Hint: You will find that 4-eyelet buttons stay on children's clothing longer if the thread is sewed through two eyelets first and then fastened securely before sewing through the other pair of eyelets.

OLD FARMER'S WEATHER FORECASTS

New England: Rain to start, then clearing; rain again latter part but clear and warm by weekend.

Greater New York-New Jersey: Week begins clear and cool, then light to moderate rain; clearing and warmer by weekend.

Middle Atlantic Coastal: Cloudy and mild with light rain all week.

Southeast Coastal-Piedmont: Generally fair and pleasant at first, then some rain; hard rain inland and sleet or snow in mountains latter part.

Florida: Storm by midweek with hard rain and heavy thunderstorms in south.

Upstate & Western N.Y.-Toronto & Montreal: Week begins sunny and seasonably cold, then rain in south and 4-6" snow in north; clear and warm latter part.

Greater Ohio Valley: Cloudy and seasonable to start, then light rain; end of week stormy with heavy snow in east by weekend.

Deep South: Showers at first, then clear and warm; heavy rain latter part in north and east with rain turning to snow in northeast.

Chicago & Southern Great Lakes: Week begins mild with light rain, then rain changing to 3-5" snow; snowstorm continues with 3-5" snow in west and 8-10" in east.

Northern Great Plains-Great Lakes: Cold with intermittent light snow all week.

Central Great Plains: Fair and warm to start, then showery with light rain and snow in north.

Texas-Oklahoma: Clear and mild to midweek, then becoming very warm; end of week warm and clear.

Rocky Mountain Region: Week begins mostly clear and warm, then showers in north; mild and cloudy latter part and turning colder with flurries in north.

Southwest Desert: Early week clear and hot with highs in mid-80s; end of week cooler with cold snap in east.

Pacific Northwest: Clear and mild to start in south, then light rain; end of week partly sunny with light shower.

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