

# LIFE on the farm



By DIETER KRIEG

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"Hey, Marv, I need some help with this one!"

Staggering towards me with an armful of rocks — his eyes scanning the ground for more — Marvin meandered to the flatbed wagon and dropped the stones.

"That one must be pregnant," he said, as he approached with a sheepish grin on his face.

"Must be," I said laughingly, "let's get it out of here before it produces a whole lot of little ones for us to pick up next year."

Grabbing it by each end, Marvin and I lifted the heavy rock and carefully deposited it on to the wagon which was almost full. We had picked thousands of stones — sometimes spending entire afternoons at this task which some people say requires "a strong back and a weak mind."

Most Pennsylvania farmers aren't fortunate enough to not have to remove wagon-loads of stones from their fields each year. You can pick a field clean this year and next year there'll be more.

Marvin, our hired man on Dad's York County farm, said it well when he joked that rocks get pregnant and reproduce. Sometimes it's hard to believe how many rocks appear from year to year. As every farmer knows, rocks are removed from fields to that machinery can be operated safely and interference from them is reduced to a minimum.

It's a tough job — one that's not only hard on a man's back and legs, but also on his enthusiasm. It's the kind of chore that's extremely boring when you're by yourself, but bearable if there's company.

Our calloused hands stood up to the constant lifting, pulling and pushing. Rocks ground soil into our palms in a "mortar and pestle" fashion. We used our arm, back and leg muscles and usually we could tell by the end of the day — or at least by the following morning — that we had labored considerably.

Normally one of us would lift and carry a rock by himself if it didn't weigh over about 150 pounds. A few weighed much more than that, requiring two or three to carry it, and if that wasn't enough we resorted to tractor power.

Nobody looks forward to an afternoon of rock picking, but there were some nice things about it: It gave a fellow the chance to exercise his muscles, and if the weather was nice you could get a neat tan.

What made it amusing was when Marvin came up with some funny comment like a rock being pregnant ... and then I could ask him if he was responsible.

"Heck no," he'd say, "what do you think I am?"



"Keep 'Sandy' in this morning," I told our hired man, Marvin, as he began to let the cows out of the barn.

"Is she in heat again, or what's the matter?" he asked, not missing a step in walking along and releasing the cows out of their stanchions.

"She failed the pregnancy test and is dropping off too far in milk production," I explained. "She'll be going to Stewartstown later in the day; make sure she has plenty of feed in front of her."

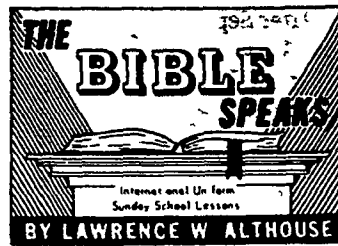
The arrival of the cattle truck almost always triggered a feeling of grief at home. I say "almost always" because there were occasions when a real loafer or temperamental cow left the barn and no one was sorry about it. But usually that wasn't the case. Some cows left the herd due to old age, others because of breeding or mastitis problems. All of them went for meat. For years they had given of themselves in terms of thousands of gallons of milk and thousands of pounds of butterfat. And then they're forced to give all that's left — their life. There's no other way.

The cattle truck backed up to the door at the southern end of the barn, gates and ramps clattering all the while.

"Okay, that's it!" I shouted as my arm instantly flew into the air to signal a stop. "That's close enough." The truck driver hopped out of the cab and ambled to the rear to check how things were lined up.

All along, like many another cow before her, "Sandy" had watched the truck approach, the door come down, and gates being fastened into place. She watched with anxious eyes. We watched with sad eyes.

We tried not to think about what a cow might think of her former master when she looked back at him and her former home through the narrow slots in the sides of the truck, on her way to the beef auction.



## BARABBAS CHOICE

Lesson for April 11, 1976

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 26 through 27.

If you go to Jerusalem today, they will show where it is believed that Jesus stood with Pilate before the crowd. Called "The Pavement," it is the place where people of the Holy City made a fateful choice for Barabbas in place of Jesus.

I have stood on that spot and closed my eyes so that in my imagination, I might see those sights and hear those sounds. I have reassured myself that I would not have been found among those who rejected the kingship of Jesus and bestowed pardon on a murderer and robber!

Yet, who knows what one would do in certain circumstances? It is so easy to make the right choice — after almost two thousand years of hindsight!

"Whom do you want . . . ?" The picture we get of Pilate is a familiar one. He might be a public official today. He has an obvious sympathy for Jesus and seems desirous of letting him go, but he is too much the politician to let himself be guided by these inclinations. He is reluctant to make a choice and shifts it over on to the crowd.

Without realizing it, Pilate makes a choice for Barabbas: instead of letting his sense of right and wrong guide him, he "plays it safe" and puts Jesus' life in the hands of the emotional crowd.

Pilate's behaviour is not so different from the actions of people in our world today. They are inclined to do the right things, but they are too fearful or too ambitious to make the right choices. They make the choice that is likely to do them the most good or cause them the least trouble. Thus, the Barabbas choice is often the choice we make to save our own skins at the expense of our souls. It is the choice of the opportunist, the coward, and the man who "didn't mean any harm."

What to do with Christ? So Pilate makes his Barabbas choice and so does the crowd. And their choice is somewhat different from Pilate's. They must choose between the man who taught that love is the measure of all things and a man who fervently believed that only armed insurrection could meet their needs.

In retrospect it seems to us an easy choice — it usually is in retrospect! But today when we are faced with that choice, we are as likely to choose wrongly as they did.

## To Continue Pesticide Education

The present effort to certify and license pesticide applicators may be placed on the "second burner" because of the extension on the required deadline. It has been changed from October of 1976 to October of 1977; at least this seems to be the latest word in Pennsylvania. Regardless of the required deadline, this program has done a lot of good and can still have pesticide applicators better informed. We encourage both farmer and custom operators to continue to keep up-to-date on all materials and application methods. We must practice safety and follow regulations.

## To Maintain Soil Organic Matter

The amount of decomposed vegetable and animal waste in the soil is regarded as organic matter; another name might be the amount of humus in the soil. The more of this material in the soil the better it will hold moisture, the easier it will work, and will provide a better home for plant roots and bacteria. At this time of the year when many fields are being prepared for planting it is suggested that maximum amounts of organic matter be incorporated into the topsoil. Livestock and poultry manure along with green manure crops (cover crops) do add good qualities to the soil. Soils that are worked hard each year with double cropping, need special attention in order to hold the amount of organic matter.

## To Get Ready

Corn planting is a big operation in this part of the

In church on a Sunday morning we read this incident and are incredulous, but throughout the remainder of the week as we are confronted with choices for either Christ or Barabbas, we approach them with the same insensitivity that influenced the crowd that day in Jerusalem. We choose violence and coercion, injustice and political gain, prejudice and cynicism, little realizing that in doing so we are rejecting the kingship of Christ and choosing Barabbas instead.

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## NOW IS THE TIME . . .

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country and before this issue of Lancaster Farming is a month old, much of the corn could be planted in southeastern Pennsylvania. The temperature of the soil is the key factor as to when to plant corn and the 50 degree F temperature is desired. Soil thermometers are available to give guidance to this decision. Seed, fertilizer, and spray materials should be on hand and the corn planter in tip-top shape. Those using the no-till method of corn planting may have to wait several days longer for the proper temperature under the layers of mulch and crop residues. Plan ahead for exactly all of the needs in order to avoid costly delays when weather and soil conditions are correct.

## To Feed Dry Matter.

Livestock being turned to lush pasture for the first few times need a prior feeding of hay, silage, or straw. This will prevent bloating or scouring and slow up the passage of the green forage through the intestinal tract. Some pastures are soon ready and animals should be accustomed to the forage gradually. The placing of a portable hay rack in the pasture area is strongly suggested. The removal of the milking herd 4 to 5 hours before the next milking period may avoid "grass" flavored milk.

## Farm Calendar

- Tuesday, Apr. 13  
Poultry Sales Service Conference, Keller Building, Penn State; program continues through Wednesday.
- Twelfth annual Franklin County ASCS banquet at the Lemasters' Community Center, Lemasters, 7 p.m.
- Thursday, Apr. 15  
Grassland Environmental FFA Chapter banquet, 6:30 p.m. Blue Ball Fire Hall.

## Update Home Insurance

When inflation and improvements raise the value of your home, increase your insurance to protect the higher worth. And don't overlook your title insurance; that might need updating, too. Chances are it covers you only up to what you paid for the home.

## RURAL ROUTE

By Tom Armstrong

