

# Survey of ag weather

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community. Last month, a representative from the GAO office and two from the Weather Service visited the Lancaster Farming office to discuss and explain programs which are being considered.

Special agricultural weather forecasts are not exclusive according to Joseph Jacques from the GAO office. Although Lancaster County has been mentioned in previous articles and announcements as a testing area, the service envisioned by the GAO and USDA is nationwide. To that end, the GAO office has prepared a questionnaire which will be distributed to a random sample of farmers across the U.S. Ag weather forecasts have already become a reality in some parts of the country.

Pertinent agricultural information on severe storms, such as were experienced in some portions of southeastern Pennsylvania this week, are just one of the many facets of weather forecasting to be included in specialized forecasts for the farmer. It's hoped that he can then be better equipped to take protective actions. Getting livestock off pastures, for example, or re-scheduling field work to save a crop.

Last Wednesday night's storm hit Lancaster County surprisingly fast. The sky darkened to the North at around 4:30 p.m. Within 15 minutes it was dark enough to give the impression of nightfall. Cars were on the road with their lights turned on. Then the black sky unleashed high winds and a

pounding rain. In some localities, hail the size of ping-pong balls pounded fields and property.

In some sections of southern Lancaster County, the onslaught of rain and accompanying run-off from hills carried valuable topsoil into streams and rivers. Some roads were caked with mud and "decorated" with limbs and branches of trees. The fury of the storm from the night before was highly evident.

Although no system of weather forecasting will eliminate such losses of property, it's hoped that damage can be lessened if farmers have more weather information at their disposal. Among the possibilities are special broadcasts on public radio, taped messages via telephone, or constant updates by way of a special radio communications network. The latter would require a special receiver which might cost in the neighborhood of \$10 or \$20.

Ag weather information by telephone is the system which has been most talked about for Lancaster County. The delay, according to

information received from Washington, D.C. is the lack of sponsorship. Commercial backing is desired to cover the costs of such a program. So far no one has offered to sponsor the weather messages.

In the survey going out to farmers at this time, farmers are asked to respond to 23 questions. A preface to a preliminary copy of the survey explained the purpose of the study in these words: "The U.S. General Accounting Office - the agency of Congress responsible for the oversight of federal programs - is conducting a review of the Agricultural Weather Service Program. The objective of this review is to assess the weather information needs of our farmers and agricultural producers and the performance of the federal programs responsible for providing these needs. This questionnaire is an important part of this review. It is designed to survey the experiences and recommendation of people like yourself who suffer the greatest loss from adverse weather conditions.

Most of the questions can be answered quickly by checking the appropriate boxes, a few require a short written answer. In fact it will very likely not take you longer than 10 or 15 minutes

to complete the entire form. Your answers will be used only for this report and will be available to a very few GAO employees working on this study. Furthermore, individuals will not be identified in this or subsequent reports. While we do not need your name, we do need to know what you, as a farmer or stockman, have to

say to the U.S. Congress. please give us your most frank and honest answers. Farmers who receive the questionnaire are asked to return it to the GAO office within ten days of receipt. Those who need further information about the questionnaire may do so by calling (collect) to Charles Smith at 214-749-3437.

## 4-H'ers chosen for report

NORRISTOWN, Pa. - Four 4-H members, of Montgomery County, have been selected among 47 Pennsylvania young adults to serve on a 4-H report to the state team, it was announced July 6.

Members of the group have recently received special communications training on the Penn State campus and will serve as 4-H ambassadors to promote the educational youth program.

Their activities will help the public more fully understand the 4-H program, an integral part of the Penn State college of Agriculture.

Team members will be available to talk to organizations at local, regional, and state levels, including 4-H clubs, college of agriculture alumni groups, legislators, and church and school functions. They also may make personal appearances at conventions and other large meetings.

Those attending were Rita

Wojton, Trappe; Stacy Seybold, Linfield; Jeff Craig (student instructor) Trappe; and Jamie Graybeal, Telford.

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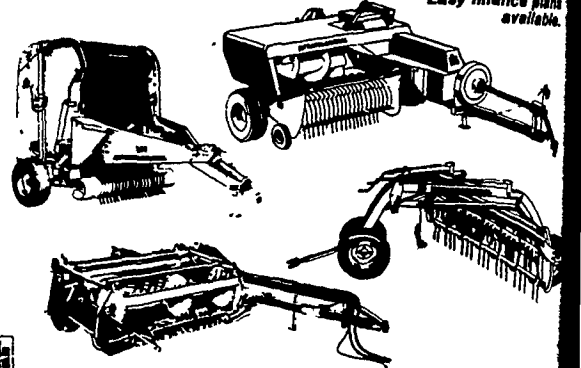
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