

**'Agriculture isn't a museum, it's a way to earn a living'**

# Protectionist farm laws opposed

By JERRY WEBB  
University of Delaware  
NEWARK, Del. - Farmers may be asking for short term



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gains and long term losses by encouraging actions that control entry into and exit from farming.

Many states now have laws aimed at controlling "city money" that's finding its way into farming. And, of course, some of the green space programs propose to lock up for future generations some of today's farms.

It's easy for farmers to support some of these efforts because they aren't happy with what's happening. They see good farmland turned into housing developments. They are outbid for the land they desperately need by city slickers who want weekend retreats. And they see city investors who made their money in town now wanting to buy into agriculture.

Some farmers are downright mad about this situation. And perhaps they should be. On the other hand, the heirs of a hard-working farmer are entitled to top dollar for that land when he's through with it. And if that dollar comes from a doctor, dentist, corporate executive or another farmer, so what? Why should the heirs sell for less

But some farmers don't see it that way. They figure they have certain rights due to the amount of time they've devoted to the profession and the past hardships they've endured. So they're quick to jump on any bandwagon that limits entry into farming or nonfarm purchases of farmland without fully considering what they may be doing to themselves and others who some day may want out of farming.

It just seems to me that laws aimed at controlling who is permitted to farm are totally out of tune with our way of life. The family farm developed as the dominant force in American agriculture because it worked best. If it's to be preserved, it will still have to work best. If it doesn't, then something else should replace it.

No doubt farmers need consideration on a long list of issues that will help them farm more efficiently, that will get the government off their backs, that will allow them to

market their produce at a profit. But preserving the family farm by law just doesn't seem right.

When you consider the fact that the family farm is doing pretty well, you must admit that special treatment really isn't needed. Government figures show that probably no more than one per cent of all farms are corporations and a big chunk of them are farm family corporations.

Sure there are fewer farms this year than last - fewer now than in 1970 or 1960. And there will be seven fewer in 1980.

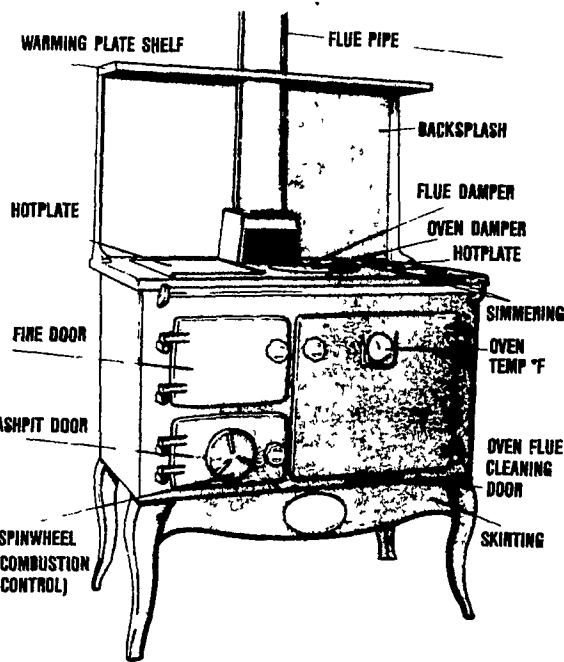
But the farms that are around in 10, 20 or 30 years for the most part will still be family farms. They'll survive and prosper because they are well financed and well managed - not because of protectionist laws aimed at preserving a way of life.

Family farms exist now and will thrive in the future because from an economic point of view, this is a pretty good way to run a farm. It actually has little to do with those misty-eyed visions of fresh air, country life, hard work and clean living.

All these things are there in abundance in rural America. But without profits they aren't much fun. Old memories of the wonderful way of life on the family farm tend to come from middle-to-upper class citizens no longer living on a farm who have never experienced or have long since forgotten the poverty that has driven and will continue to drive family farmers off the land.

Laws that would keep some people out of agriculture would in fairness force others to stay in - even after the profits are gone. Agriculture isn't a museum, it's a way to earn a living. The family farm shouldn't be saved and preserved as something to look at. Those who don't like it should be able to get out. And anyone who wants to "test the water" should be welcomed, be he corporation or not.

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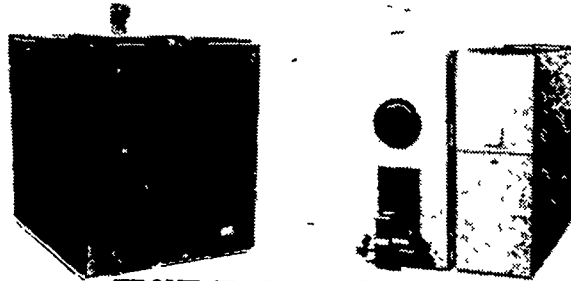


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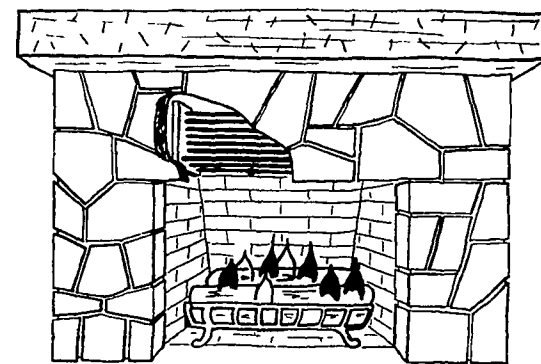
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