

Some farmland being planted for last time

LANCASTER — Spring planting is under way. In Lancaster County, the lush green and the brown soils are being

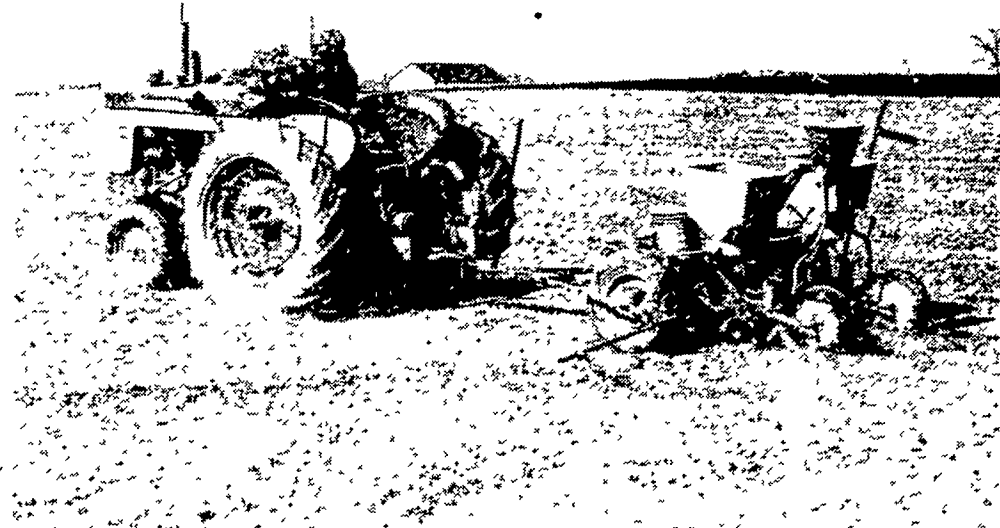
readied for seed. Everywhere, rural activity begins to promise a bountiful harvest — sometimes for the last time.

Every year, according to John B. Munson, Extension resource development agent, hundreds of acres of prime Lancaster County land are planted for the last time, before giving way to the urban bulldozer, shopping centers, homes, highways, and industries replace crops and pasture forever.

At the current rate of land conversion, there will still be a lot of good farmland left, well into the middle of the next century. Across the nation there has actually been a net increase in farmland, as new lands in the South and West are opened to agriculture. Of course, these new lands require enormous amounts of money to be productive and may depend on precarious water supplies. But here in Lancaster County we need new houses, new jobs, and new public facilities that require more and more land. Building on land that is unsuitable for agriculture usually raises the cost considerably.

Some people, of course, would like to see much of the productive land stay that way.

Some are farmers, concerned about their ability to continue earning a living in



In some places in Lancaster County, this will be the last time the ground is planted and used for agriculture.

farming. Some are environmentalists, who see farmland preservation as an important component in the protection of clean air and drinking water. Others are businessmen who make a living by supplying goods to farmers or by transporting or processing farm products. Still others are local government officials worried about their ability to provide adequate services, like roads, sewer, water, police and fire protection, to an increasingly scattered population.

A few people argue strongly for the preservation of farmland; a few, perhaps not so many, argue against

it. Most people, though, have scarcely entered the debate, much less made their opinions known. Yet whether farmland is preserved, and if so, how it is preserved, affects everyone. Obviously, all need to eat, so the preservation of food production is important to all. But there are other, more complex issues involved. Whether or not make a decision is made to preserve farmland will help to determine how the communities develop, what kind of neighborhoods people live in, where major development investments are made, and how much it will cost taxpayers to finance public services.

organizations from farm groups to Chambers of Commerce. The governor soon will issue a major land policy report, based on five years of study, research and citizen participation, in which the preservation of agriculture is expected to be the number one priority.

Townships, which have most of the farmland and make most of the land use decisions in Pennsylvania, are also struggling with the issues. The number of townships with some kind of ordinance aimed at preserving farmland is growing, but there is much to be done in order that farmland can be preserved in ways which will assure that farmers can earn a fair living and that the rights of landowners and taxpayers are maintained. There will be no easy solution. In the meantime, thousands of acres will be planted for the last time.

Pennsylvanians are wrestling with the issues of farmland preservation. Countless conferences, seminars, and surveys are being carried out across the state by all kinds of

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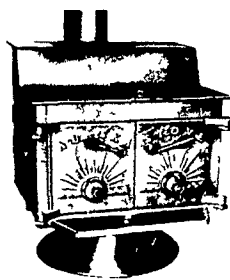
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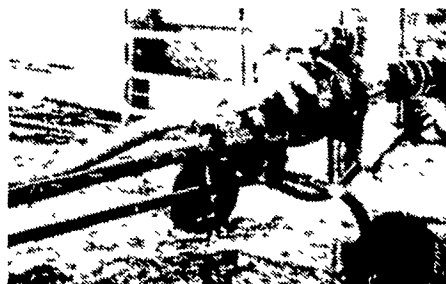
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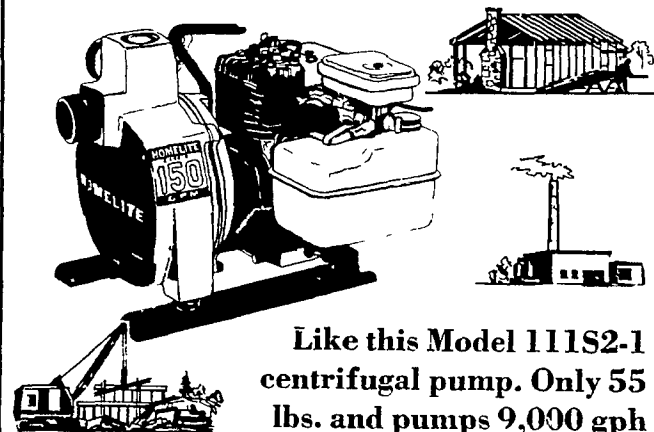
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