

Farm Women urged to become involved at rally

By SALLY BAIR
Staff Writer

HERSHEY -- Humor, inspiration, and some plan talking about the problems facing American agriculture brightened a rainy day for the 1300 Farm Women members from 18 counties who attended the Spring Rally held Wednesday at the Hershey Convention Center. Members of the Lebanon County Society of Farm Women were hostesses for the annual event.

Gail McPherson, Maple Lawn Farms, York County, called on the Farm Women to get involved in telling the story of agriculture to people who do not understand it. In an emotional appeal, Mrs. McPherson painted a gloomy picture of the future of agriculture because of what she termed a "cloud of regulations over agriculture."

Mrs. McPherson said that a farmer "is really not his own person," because of the myriad of regulations by the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Environmental Protection

Agency, the Department of Environmental Resources and other regulatory agencies.

A farmer couldn't operate if he had to adhere to all the safety standards of OSHA or if they were all strictly enforced, she said. The requirements change rapidly, and no one can afford to keep up with the changes.

Calling the regulations a "near nightmare" for those called to the land, Mrs. McPherson said that young people choosing to enter agriculture today "are facing problems you never dreamed of."

In her job as an active partner in the Maple Lawn orchard operations, she has had her share of interaction with regulatory agencies. She recalls the OSHA inspector who walked directly into the path of a forklift which was backing up, and the DER inspector who called to see what regulations he was to be inspecting for. There was also a fruit inspector who



Gail McPherson

didn't know the difference between a bruise and rot.

One of the problems with the abundance of governmental regulations, McPherson said, is, "There are so few people left with a close association with the soil. The people who have all the votes know the least about agriculture; they take everything they hear at face value and don't get the facts." She said that the survival of agriculture as we know it and as we need it is often in the hands of these powerful, but misinformed people.

As an example of misguided concern, she noted the nitrates in such things as bacon and bologna which Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman would like to have eliminated. "Without nitrates," Mrs. McPherson said, "we would die of botulism." To cover that eventuality, Mrs. Foreman proposed to use a label warning that such foods must be kept refrigerated at 40 degrees Fahrenheit at all times. Mrs. McPherson pointed out that for nitrates and nitrites to hurt people they would have to consume 15,000 pounds of the product a day - quite a lot of bacon! She said that taking one aspirin or drinking two cups of coffee is more harmful than all of the so-called harmful residues in agricultural products consumed in one year.

Mrs. McPherson said that what is needed is an agricultural public relations program with people teaching people what food is all about. She said, "There is no hope of sunshine until the non-farm segment of the population realizes that food is important." Those who believe in farming as a way of life and those who feel the family farm concept is important must work together to preserve agriculture."

She called the organization of women's agricultural

groups around the country "the rumbling of a great earthquake." In Pennsylvania we are organized not because there is a crisis, but because we don't want a crisis." Mrs. McPherson urged all farmers and those interested in agriculture to concentrate on the goals they share. "We can do it together."

She believes it is vital to educate urban consumers who are moving to the fringes of farms about the "whys" of farming' why it is necessary to spread manure and lime; why spraying must be done for insects and disease; why animals sometimes get out of their fences. These "whys" must be explained before those urbanites get angry and want to have ordinances banning these vital farming activities.

Mrs. McPherson noted that agriculture is central to the entire economy - it provides one-sixth of the gross national product, one-fifth of the total labor, and one-quarter of the total export earnings. "We pay a lot of bills," she said in an understatement.

While emphasizing that farmers must be protected from unnecessary laws, she said farmers want to be allowed to produce food freely. Farmers feel that the risk of operating under an open market is less than the political risk they may face.

Mrs. McPherson noted the work of Penns Agri Women and American Agriwomen in speaking up for agriculture. She is a charter member of both organizations. She cited the Agriculture Council of America as providing "a medium for the message of the farmer."

The Reverend Elmer Horst, pastor, Fishburn United Methodist Church, Hershey, provided the inspiration for the meeting by telling what he called a "corny" story.

Citing parables as a storytelling method, he discussed the things which can be done with corn - it can be thrown away, stored, eaten or planted.

To throw away corn seems criminal, Horst said. However he noted that in the harvest, some corn does not reach the wagon or truck and is lost. In the same way, "many a life has never been fully harvested. Think how much time you waste in 24 hours. Sometimes we just coast along."

Corn can also be stored, and Horst noted that when he lived on the farm, a full corn crib gave him a sense of security. "But all that corn is no good in a bin. Anything not used is useless." He explained that stored talents will die; muscles which are not exercised will become

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