

Business growing strong on the farm

By **JERRY WEBB**
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NEWARK, Del. — Farming has gone through a long and difficult transition—from a time when it was a means of survival to a period when it was a rather pleasant and sought after way of life, toward a time when it will be a business and little more.

There is ample evidence to show that the family farm is not an endangered species and that it will be around for a long, long time. There is also equally impressive evidence to indicate that farm numbers are decreasing, farm sizes are increasing, and the sums of money involved in typical farming operations are staggering. The evidence also shows that those family farms that are prospering are not typical of the way of life so many of us remember. Even though they're operated as family units, most of them have a very business-like approach to things.

So the family farm will probably be around for a long time, but it will become more business oriented, less of a way of life, and more of a means of earning a living. Farmers and their families will recognize fewer differences between themselves and their city cousins and they will find themselves participating in and enjoying most of the same activities.

As farmers find themselves in the main stream of American business, they face new challenges. One of those which is looming large for many mid-Atlantic farmers is what the business community calls mobility. The typical businessman goes where his job is. The profit-oriented industrialist moves his firm where conditions better suit his purpose. That's mobility—but the farmer traditionally clings to the land where he was born. For many farmers in this area clinging is costly, worrisome, and maybe even foolish.

Just because a farmer's father milked cows on the outskirts of Wilmington, Delaware doesn't mean that farmer and that farmer's son must do the same. Land that is worth millions for other purposes might better be devoted to those purposes while that dairyman moves south or west, or perhaps even north to an area better suited to his agricultural enterprise.

Some farmers have done this. They've actually traded farms, moving from the urbanized east to the gentle countryside of the Corn Belt, or to the sunny south, where the winters are milder and dairy profits are potentially higher. Some farmers who were boxed in by urban sprawl have been forced to such drastic measures or be literally closed down by their complaining neighbors.

Others have seen it coming and have gotten out when the opportunity presented itself.

But most farmers have no desire to leave the immediate vicinity where they have always farmed and where their family has always lived. In fact, most farmers count as one of their goals the opportunity for all of their children to either enter into the farm business or to at least find work where they will be close to the home place.

That ideal is rapidly vanishing. Farmers who are struggling on the Delmarva peninsula to rent vast acreages are losing economic advantages because of their physical location. Why not pull up stakes and go south or west where vast chunks of land

are still available at much more reasonable prices?

The Internal Revenue Service has made it rather easy for farmers to trade farms. The laws seem to be fairly liberal in the kinds of trades and the tax penalty can be little or nothing. Trading does require some effort on the part of the farmer, and it requires a

willingness to leave friends, relatives, and perhaps a lifetime of community involvement to start over in a strange land. But a small million dollar farm on the outskirts of an eastern city can be traded for impressive holdings in some other state. An aging dairyman with a fairly small farm might be able to trade for a large

crops farm somewhere else. Or, he might want to get into the egg business, or produce fruits and vegetables.

Here's another possibility. What about the farmer with a small place and outdated buildings who wants to continue in the dairy business? Perhaps he'd be better off to find a suitable

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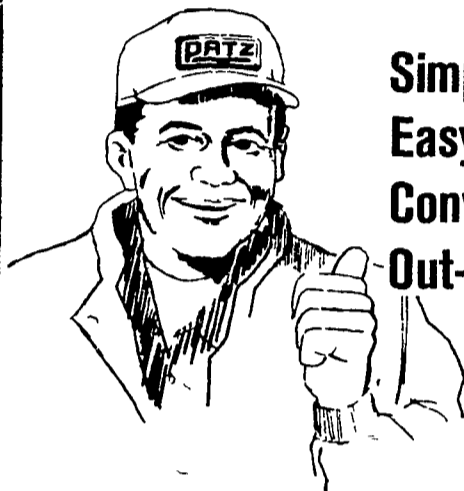
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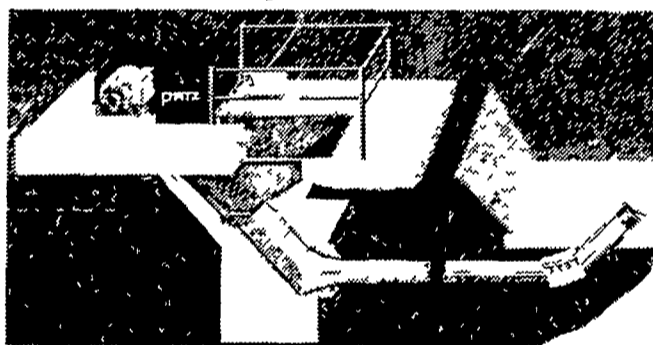


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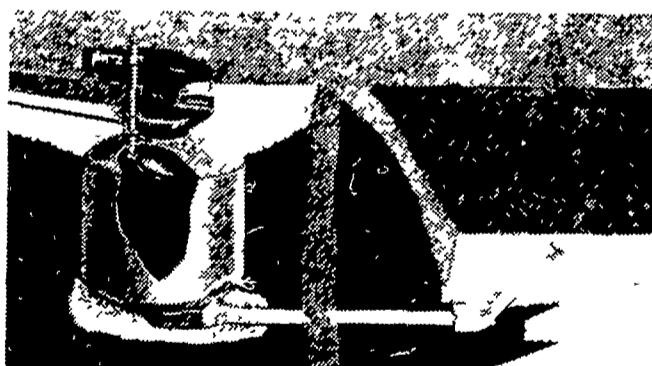
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