

# Washington's farm 'experts' try to forecast prices

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The experts are planning to do some pretty important forecasting in Washington, D.C., starting November 13.

The forum will be the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) annual Food and Agricultural Outlook Conference. Since agriculture plays such a vital role in the U.S. economy, the experts will look at more than just food prices and the general economy. They'll also zero in on the outlook for individual agricultural commodities and food products.

The Department of Agriculture has been sponsoring an agricultural outlook conference for the past 55 years, but both character and content of the conference have changed greatly over time. The evolution of the annual conference into the high-profile, packed house it is today was a long and deliberate process.

The first conference took place in April 1923 when 20 men gathered behind locked doors in a USDA conference room. The locked doors were a caution against the effect their results would have on commodity markets. The men were attempting to decide whether the amount of acreage farmers claimed they were going to plant was in line with prospective demand in the upcoming year.

The need for a conference was confirmed at that very first meeting. In at least one case, they spotted a possible trouble spot. It looked like a prospective increase in tobacco acreage was out of line with probable demand. That would mean an oversupply of tobacco and resultant lower returns to tobacco farmers.

Almost from the beginning, pressure grew to provide more localized outlook information to

supplement the national conference report. The early outlook researchers were aware that farmers were interested not only in the total national outlook, but also in how it applied to their individual localities and their individual farms.

"We can pass the buck on down to the individual farmers and tell them they'll have to figure that all out for themselves," said one of these early outlookers. "Or we can develop the outlook program to the point where we can answer those questions."

No one wanted to pass the buck. So shortly after they established the national conference, USDA outlook experts began seeking ways to increase the input from agricultural economists working throughout the country.

A group of nationally known economists and statisticians from outside the USDA drew up the first conference report. The second year, the outlook conference continued as a department affair, with no outside experts sitting on the committee. But the Washington agriculture department staff brought in USDA economists from its field offices, who could bring their knowledge of local conditions to bear on the final revision of the national reports. These economists were also responsible for adapting the outlook information to fit local needs. This led, in turn, to a series of analytical reports by commodity and thence to

newsletters and other publications.

The desire at USDA to develop its outlook program to the point where it would be truly beneficial to farmers led to formation in the 1920's of year-round outlook services.

These services greatly changed the character of the national Agricultural Outlook Conference since an even flow of outlook material became available throughout the entire year instead of being bunched into one annual effort.

The scope of the annual conference was broadened further in the 1930's when the participants decided to take a good look at the significance and impact of economic and other factors on rural living. Year by year this family living component of the conference has grown in importance as the target audience has been broadened to include families in urban as well as rural residential areas.

In 1977, the conference's name was changed to the Food and Agricultural Outlook Conference in recognition of the current outlook's critical implications for U.S. families' diets, energy use, credit and housing needs, and other related subjects. And today's conference includes sessions on our natural resources, the environment, and the weather outlook.

But despite all these changes in scope and content, the conference's basic goal has remained the same down through the years.

President Coolidge, keynoting the 1925 Agricultural Outlook Conference report, summed up the purpose rather well:

"Inasmuch as orderly production is a necessary preliminary to orderly marketing, the well-informed farmer must keep himself posted, months in advance, concerning the probable production of various (commodities) during the coming season, as well as the probable requirements of the market."

In keeping with this basic conference goal, "OUTLOOK '79" will be geared toward providing information needed by those who produce, process, and market our food and fiber products. The conference will include sessions on the outlook for major farm commodities, inputs, food prices, transportation and storage for agriculture, and inflation. There will also be a look at world developments affecting U.S. agriculture.

USDA experts feel both these topics and the consumer-oriented sessions reveal important trends people will want to know about, both as consumers and as concerned citizens.

In recent years, conference attendance has swelled to over 1,000 people, representing groups interested in or involved with U.S. food and fiber. The conference is open to the public (no more locked doors) and there is no charge to attend.

For an early guide to times and topics, send for a free copy of the preliminary program. Copies of the Conference Proceedings containing all the papers presented will be available (while supplies last) soon after the close of the conference. To receive either publication, send separate postcard requests to: Donnell Royster, USDA-ESCS, Room 0054, South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## Lancaster Co. Grange 71 meets

OAKRYN - Lancaster County Pomona Grange 71 met October 20 at the Fulton Grange Hall, Oakryn. Master Jesse Wood conducted the meeting.

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Holloway, Jr. will be representing the Pomona for the "Shrine in 79" project for the National Grange when it

comes to Lancaster, Pa. in 1979.

Pomona youth committee will be making a pennant for the National Grange.

Edward Zug was elected to the Executive committee for three years. Shirley Galebreath was elected to the Finance committee for one year, and Clifford Holloway, Jr. was elected to the finance committee for three years.

Peggy and Sandy Galebreath won first prize in the regional talent contest. They went on to the State Grange competition. Mildred Tindall had an art entry at State Grange, and Elaine Knight represented the Pomona at the State Youth Day.

The next meeting will be a dinner meeting on January 20, 1979, at 7:30 p.m. The place is to be announced.

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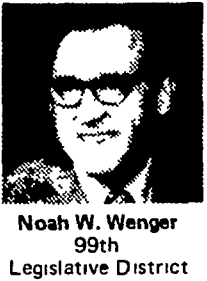
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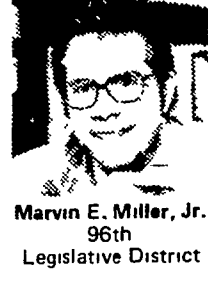
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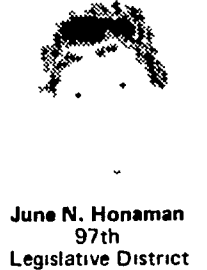


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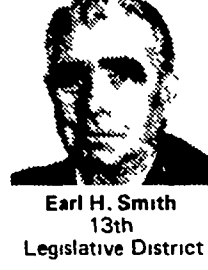
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