

Trend to bigger farms won't be reversed

By JERRY WEBB

University of Delaware Newark, Del. — The farm population in general may be decreasing, but the population of large farms is increasing. And while total farm population declined considerably between 1970 and 1975, a Department of Agriculture study shows that large farms, those with over \$40,000 in annual sales, had a population increase of 76 percent. Farms in that category now account for about 80 per cent of total U.S. farm income but only 24 per cent of total farm population.

The decline in small farm population can be viewed as almost frightening. In 1975, farms with under \$2500 in annual sales contained a third of the U.S. farmers — that's about 2.8 million people. That total declined from 3.6 million just five years previous.

The obvious conclusion from this recently released USDA survey is that large farms are getting larger and more people are living there, while small farms continue to decline. Meanwhile, don't be confused by reports that talk about a booming rural

population. While more people are moving back to the country, it doesn't mean they're moving to farms. In fact, most of them are finding their way to rural villages and country developments where they commute to urbanized employment. They may be neighbors to farmers, but they are not part of the farm population.

The Delaware State Grange has taken a fairly hard line toward some of these kinds of rural residents. In resolutions passed at its recent annual meeting, the Grange dealt with a number of farm-related actions that would tend to limit rural development. One resolution called for the Grange to actively pursue revision of county zoning codes so as to give agriculture separate status for the purpose of requiring public hearings to change land use. Another resolution called for a requirement that developers build six-foot fences between rural developments and existing farmland. And yet another resolution put the Grange on record as seeking a government policy forbidding the use of any

federal funds to finance residential, commercial or industrial development for highways on land classified as agricultural by any government entity.

Realize that these are resolutions passed by one of Delaware's leading farm organizations. That doesn't mean what Grange members want will become law, but it does mean they intend to do what they can to see that the interests of farmers are protected when it comes to the invasion of nonfarm users of agricultural land.

Delaware farm organizations in general, in fact farm organizations throughout the country, are presenting a very hard line these days when it comes to nonfarm use of farmland. In a variety of ways they're carrying the message to their urban cousins that while they love them dearly, they don't necessarily want them as neighbors. They understand that farms will be sold from time to time and that some of them may fall into the hands of non-farm buyers. But through zoning and other restrictions, they're trying to make sure that land doesn't easily

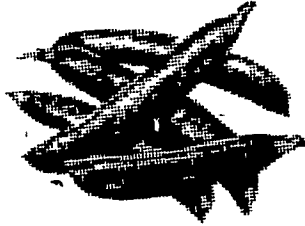
go out of farming and into some profitable use.

Farmland preservation laws, mentioned in passing by one Delaware Grange resolution, are becoming more of a factor in the future use patterns of existing farmland. States are already putting into practice a variety of plans aimed at limiting or eliminating urban encroachment into America's breadbasket. This tempo is bound to pick up during the years ahead. Farmers are demanding it for their own sake. Their farm organizations are supporting them and what they're asking for appears to be in the national good.

In the long run, America's agricultural land is a valuable asset that once lost is most difficult to reclaim. The farmland preservation theory says essentially that it's better to let the urbanites stay in the city and work at solving their problems there than it is to let them move out to the country where they gobble up land and create whole new sorts of problems.

This battle is getting hotter. Expect it to be an important issue during the next few years.

Home grown food is not always a bargain



NEWARK, Del. — As another gardening season gets under way, are you planning to freeze or can part of your crop? This can be a satisfying Summer project, but don't assume that you'll save a lot of money on food costs.

Delaware Extension Home Economist Sue Schaefer points out that there are a number of expenses to consider. First is the initial investment in tools, seeds, fertilizer, sprays, fencing (to discourage rabbits) and water (to supplement Mother Nature's watering system). Since your time is also worth money, include the cost of your labor and the continuous commitment of your time over the entire growing season.

Like farming, home gardening doesn't guarantee a successful crop yield, in spite of the gardener's skill and hard work. Crop failure, or partial crop loss, can wipe out your investment, says Schaefer.

The decision to preserve part of your crop also means choosing between canning and freezing. Freezing is the more convenient method and saves time. However, the cost per pound of your fruits or vegetables should include the initial cost of the freezer (including taxes and delivery), annual repair charges (approximately two percent of the initial cost), and continuous operation of the freezer.

The annual operating cost per pound will decrease if you keep the freezer filled to capacity. So plan to refill

your freezer throughout the year, advises Ms. Schaefer.

Additional expenses are storage containers, water for washing the food, and the energy consumed in blanching or cooking it.

Canning is the most economical way of preserving food at home, although less convenient than freezing, says the home economist. Also, it is essential to follow canning directions exactly to insure food safety.

In determining total canning costs, consider the equipment you need to buy.

This includes a hot water bath canner and/or a pressure canner, jars and lids. Also take into account the costs of energy and water.

Once the food is processed, you will need adequate storage space. However, this will not add to the expense, as in freezing.

After you have made the initial investment in freezing or canning equipment, it is important to reuse it season after season, Schaefer emphasizes. This will spread the amount over a longer time and decrease the cost per pound.

You should also use all the food you have preserved, she says. If, after the first year, you realize you have preserved more than your family can eat, cut back the next year. Food that is thrown out adds to the cost of what you do eat.

Because of the various expenses involved, home grown food can cost more than the food you buy at the supermarket. But if you enjoy the flavor, don't mind the work, and follow canning or freezing directions exactly — happy gardening and happy eating!

Scientists find electrified beef is tender and more economical

BELTSVILLE, Md. — Hot-boned carcasses will yield tender meat if the carcass is electrically stimulated before boning. Electrical stimulation reduces muscle shortening and the resulting tough meat, according to Dr. H. Russell Cross and Dr. Brad W. Berry, USDA food technologists who are investigating this process.

Not only does this method of hot boning yield tender, juicy beef, but packers can save up to 35 per cent in chilling costs and 20 to 30 per cent in labor costs over traditionally chilled and processed beef, say Cross and Berry, both with USDA's Science and Education Administration.

At the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in Maryland, the scientists electrically stimulated carcasses for two to three minutes immediately after slaughter. The carcasses were then boned, broken into primal cuts and chilled. These carcasses were compared to traditionally chilled carcasses.

Cross and Berry found that hamburgers prepared from the hot-boned carcasses were juicier, more tender and lost seven per cent less weight during cooking than hamburgers prepared from chilled carcasses. Meat from hot-boned carcasses also

contained less bacteria than meat from chilled carcasses.

Primal cuts prepared from the hot-boned carcasses lost less weight during marketing and were more tender than those same beef cuts from chilled carcasses.

"Hot-boning could save packers a considerable amount of money that could be passed on to consumers," says Dr. Cross. "However, lack of a grading system is preventing packers from adopting hot boning. At the Meat Science Research Laboratory, we are collecting data that could be used to develop grading standards for hot-boned beef."

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