



Sights and sounds of an awakening land

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN

LANCASTER COUNTY — The land awakens in many different ways.

A warming wind whirs through trees which yawn and stretch their bareness as if shedding the final kinks and stiffness of a long and deep slumber.

Each small, swaying brown tentacle is tipped with the beginning of a new life that will soon burst forth into a cloak of green.

The wind's whir is never constant.

As a whisper, it gently nudges the budding branches into a lazy, bobbing motion.

Suddenly, the volume accelerates into partially a whine and partially a whistle, pitching and rolling the trees' fragile framework frantically.

Then, the ever rising and falling natural whir is mixed with a steady mechanical drone off in the distance. The mobile, mechanized hum comes from several directions all at once.

The wrap-around stereo sound of man and machine flows forth from a colorful collage of green, brown and white.

Across a rolling field of emerging green, the source of one such sound moves systematically to and from a barn with twin cylindrical towers. The red tractor tows an empty spreader toward the barn and returns with heaping contents for casting across the land.

Drifting from another direction is a similar sound that comes from a tractor more blue than the sky overhead. Tugging and pulling slowly over a field of brown, it cuts and chisels into the earth, churning the smooth, dull shade of ground in front into a deeper, richer hue that follows on behind.

And out of yet another mechanical din, massive willowy clouds of white erupt in great, smoky puffs. In the wake of the explosion of white, a powdery dust settles to the earth like newly-falling snow.

Not too far from these varied mechanical agricultural awakening activities, an elderly couple

moves silently and slowly through a field.

She carries a small pail and he grasps a small knife.

He eases into a slow-motion stoop and swirls the knife deftly around the base of a flat, spiny plant, neatly cutting the single root.

Into her pail is tossed the plant, which in not too many weeks would blossom forth into the bright yellow of a miniature vegetative sun. But for now, covered with a warm bacon dressing, it becomes a tangy dinner salad for the aged gleaner couple.

Even the final remnants of a half-year-old harvest are being completed in still another nearby field. Corn stalks, flattened by the winter's snow that followed last fall's combining, are being fluffed by a rake. A baler, just pulled from storage, stands waiting to collect and pack the fodder before the field can be prepared to launch another season of growth.

In addition to man and his machines, animals are to be

increasingly found on the awakening land.

More and more, splashes of black and white are dotting the greening hillsides. Seemingly anxious to be free of the confinement and concrete of barns, they contentedly settle down onto the warming earth or amble aimlessly back and forth.

Sturring also are sheep still bulging with winter's wrapping of wool. As temperatures continue to gradually climb, they appear to sense the fast approaching time to be shed of the fleecy, soft coats.

As observed from an elevated view, the quilt-like patchwork of an awakening land is fast taking shape.

With a needle of spreading warmth, each day sews a new patch into the farmland fabric.

Here, a field is turning a deepening green.

There, another field is plowed into a dark, rich brown.

And over there, lime turns a field dusty white.

But even as April brings the land back to life and its caretakers to ever increasing levels of outside activity, a reminder or two

of the faded and nearly forgotten winter remain.

Large mounds of wood are neatly stacked next to many farm houses and rural homesteads as monuments to a season just past.

Now, it is a time that these stacks will lie idle and unused.

So, the cycle of pastoral contrasts goes on.

A time for awakening and activity. And a time to lie fallow and rest.

