

BY CURT HARLER, EDITOR



# Lancaster Farming says... Can farmers afford farmland?

There's an old saw in farm real estate circles that good farmland is cheap no matter how expensive it is and poor farmland is too expensive no matter how cheap it is.

Soil Stewardship Week this coming May 11 to 17 reminds us of the need to husband our fine soils.

The race to buy that good farmland has driven the price of the average acre of Pennsylvania ground up from \$373 per acre in 1970 to \$1245 by the end of the decade. That's 270 percent.

Earlier USDA estimates that farm real estate values would increase by five percent or more at the start of the 1980s now seem trivial compared to the expected value of good land once the country pulls out of its recession.

Experts say land prices may triple in the next 10 years. Pressure comes because there is no more new land, but plenty of new people; and most of our best farmland already is in production.

Returns to match the average 27 percent jump over 10 years an in-

vestor could have gotten in farmland during the 1970s make stocks, futures markets, and the Swiss franc look like poor investments.

The question "is farmland being priced out of farming" is being considered seriously by a number of economists.

Penn State Farm Management Specialist Virgil Crowley says no single group is responsible for current farm real estate values. That includes nonfarm buyers.

Everyone contributes simply because there is a large group of prospective buyers bidding for a limited supply and because farmland is a commodity which is in demand as an alternative to investment in other areas.

Nationwide, farmers buy about two-thirds of the farmland sold. Of that, 63 percent goes to farmers enlarging their operation. About a quarter of the purchases are complete units, and another 11 percent goes to part-timers.

However, in the Northeast, pur-

chase of farmland for enlargement accounts for only 38 percent of the transfers.

This may be because dairy and vegetable operations don't profit as much from big acreage increases as the Midwestern grain units.

Some observers maintain the current prices of land pose some serious problems for farmers and agriculture unless there are adjustments either in the price of farmland or the prices farmers receive for their production.

But farmers don't seem to agree. Their purchases of land indicate faith that they can handle the debt load.

While high farmland values give an established operator the credit base he needs to borrow to go more deeply in debt, they also can lure the young, struggling operator into selling his high-priced land.

A whole series of costs, debt loads, and potential returns gives a whole series of break-even points for the farmer.

But Crowley, as handy as any

economist with a computer, reached a somewhat surprising conclusion.

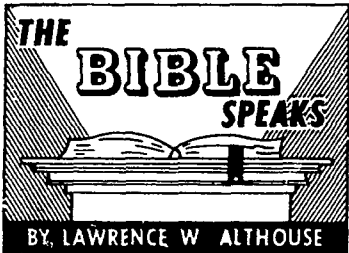
"The ability of farmers to supplement income from purchased farmland with income from other farm enterprises rests primarily on their management ability," he says.

Management: difficult to define, elusive to put a number on, easy to see in the final analysis.

The bottom line, Penn State says, is not the cost of the land nor high interest rates. The bottom line, for both the established and beginning farmer when net cash income from the land fails to meet cash flow demands, will be management.

If only it could be entered into our checkbooks.

Prayer, too, may help... it seems many of our rural churches have forgotten to celebrate Soil Stewardship week. The freshly turned-over ground should remind preachers this week that a good sermon for the next service will be land — its management and care entrusted to mankind.



## ON "GETTING IT RIGHT"

Lesson for May 4, 1980

Background Scripture:

1 John 3: 1-18; 4: 7 through 5:21

Devotional Reading:  
1 John 3:11-18

If I had my way — which I don't — I would make the reading of 1 John mandatory in each and every church every Sunday morning — until as Christians we "get it right!"

Why 1 John? Because this epistle puts the very essence of being a Christian in the clearest, most uncompromising language. Of course, we "know" that God is love and that, as followers of Christ, we are to love one another as he loved us. But many of us are like the little boy who was disciplined by his teacher to writing on the chalkboard 100 times: "I will

not throw spitballs in class." He "knew" he wasn't supposed to disrupt the class, but his "knowing" did not keep him from doing it. By the time he finished writing this affirmation on the board, I think we can assume that he "knew" it a lot better than before.

By This We Know

In a similar manner we also "know" about Christian love, but we don't frequently enough give the appearance of having "gotten it right." This is why 1 John is so challenging to us. What is the central "message" of the Gospel which John's readers

have received "from the beginning?" That "we should love another" (3:11). What are the yardsticks by which Christ measures our love for him?

"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer..." (3:15).

"...if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him..." (4:18).

"...he who fears is not perfected in love..." (4:18).

I don't know about you, but I don't do too well with that checklist. I may avoid the word, "hate, for example, but there are some people to

whom I respond with a hateful attitude. To be sure, these people are usually "safe" objects of my hostility: welfare chiselers, violent criminals, dishonest politicians (usually of the other party), nations and peoples who treat the USA with disdain or contempt, department store clerks — there's really quite a list. But the writer of 1 John makes it so painfully clear that, in reality — God's reality — none of them are "safe" for me to hate. For, "If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar" (4:20).

In Deed And Truth

1 John also helps us to realize that what God in Christ wants from us to is not necessarily loving feelings and declarations, but loving deeds. The test of Christ's love was "that he laid down his life for us," and the test of our love is, not how we feel about those infuriating Communists and disturbing John Birchers (our angry feelings are more than justified), but how we act toward them. For the test of our love is the same as our Lord's: "We caught to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3:16).



## NOW IS THE TIME

By Max Smith Lancaster County Agricultural Agent  
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### TO PLAN GASOLINE NEEDS

Despite the absence of a gasoline shortage in Pennsylvania this spring, gasoline continues to be on an allocation basis for farmers. Farmers are to be guaranteed 100 percent of their base period gasoline purchases; this base period was from November 1977 through October 1978. If crop

acres have been increased, or if there has been a change in the type of crops grown, gasoline allocations can be changed. Also, it is strongly suggested that farmers maintain their current suppliers. We are informed that the Department of Energy will not transfer base period allocations from one supplier to another. If needs are

not being satisfied, or if changes are to be made, farmers may contact the local ASC office, or in Pennsylvania contact the Governor's Energy Council at Harrisburg, 717/783-1650. Plan ahead for gasoline needs in order to prevent costly delays.

TO BE CAREFUL WITH WEED KILLERS

Many property owners and farmers will be doing considerable herbicide spraying in the coming months. All weed killers are approved for certain weeds in a stated

amount, and to be applied at definite times. These regulations should be closely followed. However, most weed killers will also kill other shrubs and desirable plants. This is where the trouble begins. Spray applicators should keep in mind the danger of drift of the sprays, and the danger of vapors from the herbicide in hot weather. Any of these can cause damage to nearby crops and plants. Farmers operating in sub-urban areas should be extremely careful with wind direction at the

time of spraying. Many shrubs and trees can be damaged because of reckless applications.

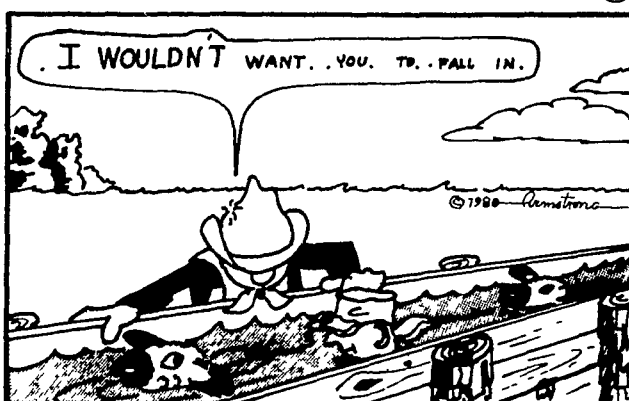
TO BECOME PESTICIDE RE-CERTIFIED

If you were too busy to attend a farm meeting this past winter, you may have missed your chance to become pesticide re-certified by this summer; this was done at most of our Extension meetings held since January. However,

I'm informed that the State Department of Agriculture has extended the deadline until January 1, 1981 to become re-certified; the original deadline was September 30, 1980. This will permit applicators more time to attend an educational meeting to become eligible for re-certification. In addition, most farmers and gardeners can make the needed purchases for this season by September 30. The need to

(Turn to Page A28)

### RURAL ROUTE



By Tom Armstrong

### Farm Calendar

**Saturday, May 3**  
Penn State dairy day, main campus, University Park.  
MD sheep breeders and lamb show, Howard County fairgrounds, continues through Sunday.  
MD Ayrshire sale, Frederick fairgrounds, Frederick, MD.  
Allegheny County State 4-H citizenship tour.

MD wool crafts festival, Howard County fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD.  
Montgomery County tractor safety driving exam at the Vo-Tech.  
**Sunday, May 4**  
Adams County apple blossom festival, Arendtsville fairgrounds, tours start 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

(Turn to Page A28)