

# Haldeman retires after 30 Extension years

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**LEESPORT** — After thirty years of service, James Haldeman, Berks County's Senior County Extension Agent, is retiring.

Born and raised on a farm in Danboro, agriculture has always remained his calling.

Haldeman's career with the Cooperative Extension Service began in February 1950 when he was assigned to Montgomery County. As an assistant agent, he worked mainly with 4-H clubs and in agricultural engineering.

In less than four years, however, he was reassigned to become the county agent for Berks County in October, 1953. He has been there ever since, working with farm families and the many problems they have faced in the past twenty-seven years.

Haldeman has seen Berk's

agriculture change rapidly and has been instrumental in helping farm productivity within the county increase as farm numbers decreased.

Working through the Extension Service, a program established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Haldeman has been the "grass roots contact" through which new information and improved farming practices have been passed down from the state universities to the farming population.

It has been this role which the county agent says he has enjoyed most. "Working on the production level with farm families and seeing my recommendations being put to use with the resulting increased productivity has been the most enjoyable aspect of my job," he told Lancaster Farming.

Haldeman accepted his role with the Extension Service after graduating from Penn State, where he majored in agronomy. Before attending college he spent 3½ years in the Air Force as a fighter pilot. During his hitch, he and his wife Betty were married. Over the years, the Haldemans were blessed with three children: Kathleen, now residing in California; Donald, who operates a greenhouse and vegetable farm at R1 Leesport; and James Jr., an assistant county agent in York County.

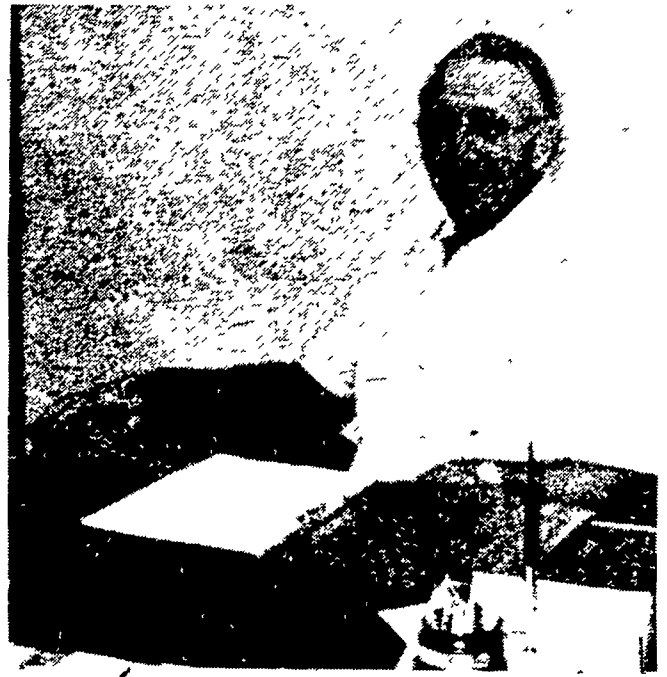
Haldeman's responsibilities in the Extension office included office management, field crops, dairy, poultry, and agricultural engineering. He has also been involved in increasing the cooperation in

educational programs with surrounding county extension offices as various commodity organizations have grown into multi-county associations.

This senior county agent has seen his office staff increase from four employees to the present 15, growing to meet the new problems communities have to face.

Today the Extension service is involved in community problems such as resource development as well as the traditional educational responsibilities carried out before.

"In more recent times, county agents have been able to more or less specialize in various areas where they had to be able to field questions from all areas in earlier years," Haldeman explained. Ex-



Berks County Agent Jim Haldeman is retiring after over 30 years of service.

tension work has become more complex, he added.

Haldeman has seen 4-H programs and enrollment increase dramatically throughout the county. This year he said he expects the county enrollment to reach 3,000 and keep growing.

In recent years, 4-H clubs have been started for low income members residing in urban areas of the county. Today the extension staff has the equivalent of 3½ full time employees working with 4-H programs alone.

Prior to 1974, the offices of the Berks County Extension Service had always been based in the city of Reading, too inaccessible to farm people, Haldeman stated. But with the building of the Berks County Agricultural Center, Haldeman's office was moved closer to the farming community, making the Extension Service's job more efficient and easier to administer.

"There has been closer contact with farmers since then," the county agent remarked, "and more farmers have become aware of our services."

Noting how much agriculture has changed since he began his career, Haldeman commented on the changing but stable dairy business in Berks Co.

"Today," he began, "there

are less than 400 dairy farms in the county. Thirty years ago there were three times that number. The number of cows have decreased in that time span from approximately 35,000 head to somewhere less than 30,000 today. In spite of this decrease in dairymen and dairy cows, milk production has been continually increasing."

Today there are increased numbers of crop farmers in Berks County, and there has been heavy expansion in swine and poultry industry in the last few years. The poultry expansion has mainly been in broiler production in the western end of the county, Haldeman added.

The retiring agent pointed out farms in the area had increased in size rapidly following World War II but since have decreased to about one-third the number. "The farms today are more specialized and investment has increased dramatically," he noted. "However, the basic problems faced by farmers today haven't changed. Economics is still the name of the game."

A major problem he sees many farmers faced with today is the labor shortage. Finding competent and affordable labor is a difficult task, he said.

The gradual increase in regulations affecting the farming community does not concern him, however. "Most of the regulations affecting farmers are not too far out of line," Haldeman stated.

What does the future hold in store for the Extension service? Haldeman said he believes that soon most recommendations coming from an Extension office will be through computers. In many cases the information will flow directly to the farm, he predicted.

When asked what the future holds in store for the retiring agent, Haldeman just smiled, then commented that there were no definite plans yet but working with his son's greenhouse and vegetable business was a possibility. Most likely he will catch-up on some fishing or other recreation, he said, as long as he can stay "out from under his wife's feet."

One thing for certain — he will definitely be missed by many farmers and other agricultural people in Berks County.

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