

Fruit grower travels to China for Pa. products

BY SHEILA MILLER
FAIRFIELD — Some farmers feel they've gone a long way to market their produce when they take it to a neighboring state. But Guy Donaldson, an Adams County fruit grower and chairman of the Pennsylvania Agriculture Cooperative Marketing Association, decided to go all the way to China to look for new markets for Pennsylvania products.

Actually, Donaldson was invited by Lieutenant Governor William Scranton to be one of a party of 12 representatives from Pennsylvania to travel to the Republic of China, Taiwan. The Keystone State joined 500 delegates from across the nation in the venture to stimulate trade between ROC and the US.

Donaldson recalled that he found out about the invitation on May 12. Just nine days later, after a rat-race rush to get all the shots he needed and his passport, Donaldson was on the plane with Richard Newpher, Administrative Secretary of the Pennsylvania Farmers

Association heading for Taiwan.

There were representatives of manufacturing, the coal and nuclear power industries, bankers, and farmers of all types and descriptions on the trip, recalled Donaldson. As a Pennsylvania apple grower, he said, he was unique.

The trade conference, which ran from May 26 to May 30, kept the representatives busy with the business end of the trip, said Donaldson.

"The ROC is trying to get technological knowledge from the US on how to improve their agriculture," he related. "They've come a long way on their own over the past 22 years when most of them left the Mainland."

"They are looking to us for imports of grain, like wheat, corn and soybeans which they don't produce. These grains are used by the ROC farmers to make high protein feed for livestock."

"Eventually, their goal is to be able to produce enough food to feed their 18 million population and still have enough leftover to export.

They're out to build their economy through industry — they're not concerned about the pollution it creates to reach their goal.

"You hear about the Chinese farmers using water buffalo, but they are getting more modern. I saw one farmer using a late model Massey Ferguson tractor in his field."

"Chinese custom has given the average farmer there the 'I'm from Missouri' attitude. They won't make changes unless you prove it works. Efforts are being made however through their Extension Service to teach progressive farming and get the modern farmer out of the minority."

Donaldson told how on the trip, the farmers representing the US were unable to meet and talk with the average Joe Doe Chinese farmer. Instead they met with conglomerates, the big cooperatives.

"I was disappointed, but I guess that wasn't the purpose of the trip," he said.

Even though he didn't get to meet any of the typical ROC farmers, Donaldson

heard plenty about them and their operations. He said that as incredulous as it may sound, the average farmer's income is only \$2100 a year. "But then you have to figure that there are 36 Taiwanese dollars to every \$1 in US currency," he added.

The typical farm on Taiwan averages anywhere from 3½ to 6 acres, Donaldson said. He added there is no suburban buffer zone between the farms and the city — the farms butt up against 10-story sky scraper walls.

"With the size population as is found on Taiwan, land is at a premium," noted the PACMA chairman. "They don't waste anything. I was especially impressed by their desire to preserve the best land."

"On one bus trip we took, I noticed a cemetery with tombstones almost standing on top of one another that stretched for at least five miles, but it was up on a steep hillside on land that couldn't be used for farming or industry."

The destination of the bus trip was the southern end of

the island where most of the agriculture is found. The delegates visited one of the larger hog operations where 50,000 hogs are raised each year in total confinement.

Donaldson said he was impressed because it was a complete set up that started with the mixing of feed to the end product — the canned ham.

"The average litter size for the operation is 9½ pigs per litter, which is as good as US averages according to the hog farmer representatives at the conference," he said. "Their records on feed conversion show they are as good as in US operations too."

As far as what type of hogs were raised, Donaldson said the operation had Landrace x Hampshire x Duroc crossbreds. The breeding stock, he noted, was imported from the US.

One drawback to the operation, as far as Donaldson was concerned, was the large amount of hand labor that was used. "The feed was mixed by machines and brought to the hog barns in a large truck, but then it was dumped and taken down the aisles in a cart and shoveled into the troughs."

"I guess when you have a population of 18 million in a country the size of Illinois though you have the people to do the hand work."

On their trips around the country, Donaldson noticed most of the farmers double cropped their fields in order to get the most out of their tiny parcels. Some of the grain was stored in a large modern facility he saw where the silos were 8 stories tall and could store 85,000 tons of grain at one time.

When Donaldson noticed large piles of grain lying next to the exit ramps along the highways, he said his curiosity got the best of him. When he asked one of the other travellers why the grain was just dumped along the road, he was told that's how the chaff is removed from the farmers' grain. Furthermore, it was considered a violation of the law for a person to drive over the grain.

Other trip memories that the Pennsylvania delegate recalled include a new drink that he said he 'wouldn't be surprised if it becomes an export to the US.' Donaldson described the drink, called yogurt by the ROC people, as a delicious mixture of pineapple juice and milk. It was nothing like the yogurt we have here, he said.

The cage layer operations stood out in Donaldson's mind too because the chicken houses were not enclosed. "The mild climate only requires a roof — the rest of the building is open making them rather inexpensive to construct."

Giving in to his apple growers' inquisition, Donaldson ventured into a local supermarket to check the price of apples in

Taiwan. To his amazement, he saw a sign quoting the price of the Red and Yellow Delicious apples — \$1.30 a piece.

During his four-day stay, Donaldson said the weather was typical for the island at that time of year — it rained almost every day. "Their rainy season was just starting."

But as he was ready to leave with the other delegates, the sun broke through and sent the visitors off under golden skies.

Will there be a golden future for marketing Pennsylvania farm products in Taiwan? Donaldson said he is hopeful, but it is not something that can be done overnight.

He said he came away from the conference with indications the ROC would be interested in importing several farm products from Keystone farmers, including eggs, peaches, maple syrup, apples, and grain.

"The disadvantage Pennsylvania has as far as exporting apples to Taiwan is that Washington is so much closer. The same goes for grain, with the Western states having a closer road to China. And the eggs — would they be refrigerated or powdered?"

Donaldson pointed out the Chinese use little processed food in their diets, with most of the country people going to market every day to buy fresh vegetables and fruit. Unfortunately, most of what Pennsylvania has to sell has to be processed in order to make the long trip.

"There are definite long range possibilities though for developing trade with Taiwan," he said. "We've opened the doors of communication through the trade conference — now we have to work to keep them open."

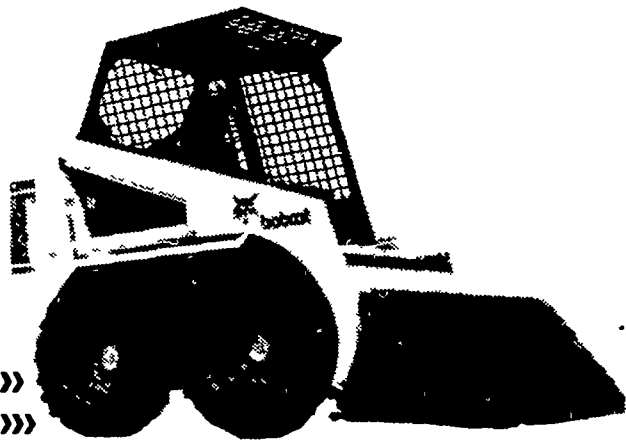
To do this, Donaldson said Pennsylvania farmers may have to think about bringing over some Chinese representatives to look at what agriculture here has to offer.

At the same time, Donaldson added, farmers will have to be foresighted enough to understand that for international exports to be successful a steady supply is essential.

"Sometimes we farmers are our own worst enemies. We're so afraid someone else will get a little more money for a product than we do. We don't seem to understand what a permanent market for our produce can mean."

Donaldson concluded by saying no definite meetings to continue trade negotiations have been set, but he noted an exporting firm will be staying in touch with PACMA in the future.

In closing, Donaldson cautioned, "The people of the Republic of China are hard working and out to get ahead. If we don't get our heads out of the sand, they're going to pass us by."



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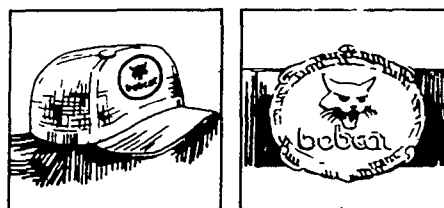
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