

Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

I read your editorial of October 25 "The Three Percent Solution", as an indirect reply to Jerry Webb's last two Farm Talk columns in which he sings the familiar tune that fewer farmers and bigger farms means better farming.

Without specifying the possible conditions that would bring it about, you say that a time will come when three percent is not enough. I agree, and find Mr. Webb's last two pieces as trite paeans for the American agricultural system that has evolved over the last 35 to 40 years. We have no guarantee that the same trends will continue — and maybe they shouldn't.

The Farm Talk column of October 25 bothered me so much that I crafted a rebuttal. His comments about the greatness of American agriculture raised some questions. I did some research and found some answers — and they in turn led to more questions.

Webb described the "phantom" farming of the

Delmarva peninsula, marveling at its productivity and efficiency, but prudently declining to pass judgment on its long-run value in our civilization.

Then one week later, in his October 25 column, he reversed himself and came down firmly in support of government paid research into more mechanization, more bigness, more efficiency, and fewer people on the land. Quote: "There's no question that America has developed the best agricultural system in the world."

This view betrays an agribusiness bias, and sees farmers as just another factor or cost of production. The more we can produce, with the least labor, the better, according to Mr. Webb. Several things are wrong, or at best one-sided in that analysis.

First of all, "efficiency" and "productivity" are relative terms. We have to ask, against what input is America's farm output efficient? In terms of man-hours of labor, our

production is indeed marvellous. agreed, only three farmers can feed 100 Americans and have a surplus left over.

To use another measure of productivity — yields per acre — our superiority is unchallenged, but only in corn. Several European countries get double our wheat and barley yields.

And still more productivity questions crop up: what if we ask about yields per gallon of fuel, or yields per ton of fertilizer, or yields per dollar of capital invested? And, while we're asking, can our system that produces so much per acre sustain itself over many generations?

It's only been about 35 years that those three or four farmers have been feeding 100 of the rest of us, a very short span compared to the millenia over which we humans have drawn our sustenance from the soil.

Those questions must be asked, even if the answers might disturb those long accustomed to uncritically accepting whatever the economists and engineers tell them is progress.

Some answers, barely scratching the surface of a whole new way of looking at American farming:

U.S. farm output increased by 90 percent from 1940 to 1975, during the same period that so many people left the farm labor force. Wonderful, maybe. But... during those same years fertilizer use increased 900 percent. New question: are we depleting the fertility of

our topsoil and hiding the loss by pouring on more chemical fertilizers?

American corn growers on average use 80 gallons of fuel per acre of corn. How much longer will OPEC allow us to boast of that doubtful efficiency? The no-till hand-wagon rolls on with less fuel, but at what expense in petroleum-based herbicides and pesticides?

One study of Indiana farms found an average of \$500,000 invested per worker. (Even General Motors has only \$40,000 invested per worker.) Is this a desirable capital-to-labor ratio? Is it really efficient to farm with money instead of with people?

To say that America has developed the best agricultural system in the world is chauvinistic prattle — something we'd expect from incumbent candidates in an election year, but not from an intelligent observer of global trends in agriculture.

The system, with all its good and bad points, developed as it did because of conditions unique to America: fertile (and formerly cheap) land, cheap energy, and an ever-growing industry could absorb surplus rural labor.

These conditions are changing; our farming system never was the best for every time and place, and may not prove the best for the coming times in this place.

Maynard Withesell
R8 Johnstown

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed your editorial about the KILE. As mentioned there are many things large and small that must be changed for the show to remain viable.

In your opening comments you mentioned The Standard of Perfection Polled Hereford show scheduled for the 1981 event. This breed event can definitely add greatly to the entire show but only if show officials are ready to do things properly as should be the case with a major stock show.

The basic purpose of a stock show would have to be considered both educational and promotional. It is safe to assume that those animals that are shown are high value individuals; not only, to an individual breeder, but in many cases to the breed as a whole.

My first acquaintance with KILE was at the time when I was a member of the Ohio State Intercollegiate Judging Team. The stock show not only presented an outstanding contest but an excellent display of purebred livestock. Most all the leading herds East of the Mississippi were present.

At recent shows this attendance has not been evident. Some of the same individuals were involved with the show throughout the entire period. But, they are individuals and cannot be expected to buck against a system that seems determined to extinguish the interest of prospective exhibitors.

The facilities provided at the present KILE are, at best, substandard, when the beef cattle were housed in the cattle barn; now used to stall horses, and they were shown in the large arena, these surroundings made for a much safer & prestigious exposition.

It seems to be a totally opposite position of KILE show management to confine the progress of this show when the national attitude of major livestock shows is toward better facilities and improved cooperation between exhibitors and show management. There are a few superintendents who really do seem to earnest to do the best job they are allowed to do.

Cliff Orley, owner
Keystone Cattle Service
Member, Eastern National Livestock Show
Board of Directors



GIGANTIC SELECTION
In
Lancaster Farming's CLASSIFIEDS

HURRY!
Sale prices good only through **SATURDAY, NOV. 15, 1980**



Famous Brand High Detergent Motor Oil
SAVE up to 3.95 per case

19⁹⁷ per case
Straight Weights
Reg 23 52 / SAVE 16%

20⁹⁷ 10W/30 Quarts
Reg 24 95 / SAVE 16%

21⁹¹ 10W/40 Quarts
Reg 25 92 / SAVE 14%

Comfort Glow

119⁹⁹
Reg 129 99 / SAVE 10 00
24040 260
9,300 B.T.U. Kerosene Heater
Heats by radiation and convection. Features electronic push button starting and convenient removable cartridge fuel tank. Get clean heat and nearly 100% fuel efficiency with this compact portable.

LIMIT 16 Per Customer

77[¢]
Reg 99[¢] / SAVE 22%
AC, Champion, or Motorcraft Spark Plugs
For most makes and models of cars, trucks, tractors and many other engines.

97[¢]
Reg 1 14 / SAVE 14%
Resistor Plugs

11 GAUGE TOP and BOTTOM WIRE
12 1/2 Gauge Center
39" high, 6" spacing
24706-282
\$73⁹⁹

47" high, 6" spacing
24707-282
\$83⁹⁹

9 GAUGE TOP and BOTTOM WIRE
11 Gauge Center
39" high, 6" spacing
24678-282
\$103⁹⁹

47" high 6" spacing
24681-282
\$117⁹⁹

Gas Engine Log Splitter
Standard model complete. Comes with spring center valve and semi-pneumatic low speed tires on rim. 3.5 h.p. Briggs & Stratton engine. Single stage pump 3" diameter x 18" stroke cylinder. Splitting capacity up to 20" long. Splitting force up to 18 000 lbs.



499⁹⁹
Reg 599 99 / SAVE 100 00
129651279

3 Pt. Hitch Wood Splitter
Fits category 1 or 2 allows you to split a cord of wood in less than an hour. Exclusive quick adjustment backstop heavy duty construction can be used free standing with ground stand or mounted on tractor. Uses 8" to 18" stroke hydraulic cylinder. Does not include cylinder valve hoses or stand.
Stand for above 12953 279 37 99



199⁹⁹
Reg 239 99 / SAVE 40 00
12951 279

FARM & FAMILY CENTER

LANCASTER
1570 Manheim Pike, Hwy 72 North
Ph: 717-569-0111
Sale Hours
8:30 - 5:30 Mon - Fri
8:30 - 5:00 Saturday

CHAMBERSBURG
1351 Lincoln Way East
Ph 717-264-8282
Store Hours
9-6 Mon - Thur
9-9 Fri, 9-5 Sat

All items are subject to stock on hand. We reserve the right to limit quantities. Sale ends on the above date.