



# Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

New Castle County, Delaware, farmers face a real moral dilemma when it comes to their attitudes about a new landfill

No one wants a landfill, or dump as we used to call them, in the neighborhood. And no one can blame the residents of southern New Castle county for not wanting one in their neighborhood. The suggestion of several sites simply involves more people in the battle and poses a threat to more citizens.

After the hearings are all held and the last citizen has been heard, it looks as though the Delaware Solid Waste Authority has the power to do whatever it wants to do anyway. But maybe it's better that this governmental agency post its shopping list and then let the outcry begin.

In that way, perhaps it can find the one least objectionable site and then develop it.

But that's still not going to solve the problem, at least for those farmers and other concerned citizens who must coexist with it. If we assume the Solid Waste Authority will listen to all of the pros and cons and then make the best possible decision and pay a fair market price for the selected site, do opponents still have an argument?

They probably do, but if they do, they must admit that the old argument that a farmer has the right to do anything he wants with his land just doesn't hold up. For whatever he does with that land that isn't a traditional use upsets someone.

Maybe he wants to buy junk cars and start a salvage yard, or maybe build mushroom houses, or how about a camp for juvenile delinquents?

A landfill is just one of many objectionable uses for agricultural land—one that a lot of agricultural folks can rally around, especially when the fill ingredients come from an urban area.

Most farmers seem to take the position that they do have the right to use their land just about as they see fit. If that means selling off some lots for housing, that's okay. But as we've already seen throughout Delaware, that kind of strip development causes problems for other farmers.

If they decide to develop a swine feeding operation that draws flies and smells bad, then they create problems for the entire area, and so some agency of the government steps in and reminds them of the rights of others. And maybe that's part of the key to this whole land-use problem.

Maybe a farmer has the right to do whatever he wants with his land as long as that use doesn't interfere with the rights of other people, and if it does, maybe his rights aren't paramount.

Taking that a step farther, if a government agency—in this case the Solid Waste Authority—is willing to pay for a parcel of land, that property then belongs to the agency.

Do neighbors still have the right to object just as they would have objected to a smelly hog house? And does the landowner, simply because it's a government agency, have the right to ignore these objections any more than a private individual would?

Obviously, Wilmington's waste has to go somewhere and it probably costs less to put it in a landfill in southern New Castle County than anywhere else. But is that the only criteria, and are those sites selected by the agency the only possibilities, or are those just the ones that it thinks are best?

Maybe someone has a better idea.

Every time there's talk about farmland being used for something besides farming, there's a great hue and cry about the loss of agricultural productivity and yet farmers still want to maintain the right to sell their own farmland for residential development.

Is it any more harmful to agriculture to devote a few hundred acres to the solution of an urban disposal problem than it is to allow hundreds and hundreds of acres to be gobbled up for dwellings and farmettes for urban people who would like to live in the country?



## Ag Secretary pushes positive letter support

HARRISBURG — State Agriculture Secretary Penrose Hallowell Tuesday urged Pennsylvania milk producers in Federal Order areas to continue their use of the "Positive Letter" in 1981 to support milk promotion programs.

Hallowell said, "It is vital that present milk promotion programs in the state be continued. Questions have been raised concerning the effects of a statewide milk marketing order, but until such a program is in place, producers should continue to participate in existing promotion programs."

He noted produce in Federal Order 2 must renew their positive letters for another year beginning in April. Milk producers in Pennsylvania's other

two Federal Orders are urged to remain with their promotional programs, especially in view of anticipated record surpluses this spring.

Hallowell noted the actual date at which the proposed Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Program may take effect is uncertain. The process of drafting, public hearings and a referendum must be completed before such an order could be adopted for the industry.

"Budgeting and planning for the Federal Order areas for 1981 have been based on the continued support of Pennsylvania dairymen. Producers should continue to support these agencies to prevent disruption of existing programs," Hallowell said.

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It seems to me the loss of an acre of farmland is a net loss to agriculture regardless of the use. And if farmers object to landfills because they use farmland, they must also object to rural residences because of pollution, nuisance or other factors the same way they might object to some other nonagricultural use that causes a specific problem, then at least they're being consistent.

I suspect southern New Castle County is going to get a landfill

whether it wants one or not. It's more a matter of site selection and price per acre. The county has posted its list of possibilities, and now it's up to the citizens to advise it as to the one least-objectionable location.

Area farmers will no doubt have a lot to say during this process. I just hope they remain consistent in their attitudes so as not to confuse folks even more in the whole area of farmland preservation.

## SCS president suggests water conservation

LEBANON — A leading State conservation official called for communities and landowners to consider all possible ways of returning waste water to the land to recharge declining ground water levels.

George Wolff of Lebanon County, President of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, pointed out that the more land is paved over and the more home and agricultural wastes are piped away, the quicker the area will feel the effects of a drought. Community officials and landowners must be innovative in finding ways to safely return waste water to the land.

Spray irrigation of sewage effluent has been proven to be feasible by experiments at Penn State. Caution must be used regarding hazardous chemicals, added Wolff, but this can be handled through monitoring and regulation.

Spray irrigation can also be used to return animal waste to the soil and at the same time increase crop productivity. Wolff recommended that farmers with large numbers of livestock develop an animal waste management system to assure proper and full utilization.

Technical assistance is available through county conservation districts and cooperating agencies such as the Soil Conservation Service and the Cooperative Extension Service. Financial cost share help is available through the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

Wolff summed it up with a personal observation. "Two years ago sewers were installed in the area near my farm. All this waste water is piped out of the neighborhood, and now people are having wells go dry that never went dry before, not even in the five-year drought of the 1960s."

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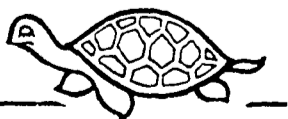
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