

BY CURT HARLER, EDITOR



# Lancaster Farming says...

## Pay a fair wage

What's more difficult to find than a cow that will produce 20,000 pounds, a lamb that'll reach 100 pounds in 90 days, or a field yielding 175 bushels of corn per acre?

The answer is a good hired hand. We can find little sympathy for the farmer who is looking for new help every six or nine months. On an operation like that, the problem rests with management and not the hired labor.

Even on the best of farms there is a wide difference between what the help receives in pay and what they deserve.

It is to farming's shame that the worst treated workers often are those who aren't hired outsiders, but rather are members of the operator's family.

It's no secret that farm operators realize less return than other small businessmen. And farm labor likewise receives less income. But

there is a limit to how little a hired hand and family can receive and still survive. In some cases it seems the hand must be a better money manager than the boss.

Worse yet, the figures for pay on Pennsylvania's thriving farms are poorer than for the nation as a whole.

The Crop Reporting Service this week put farm wage rates, for all methods of pay converted to an hourly rate, at \$3.73. That's less than \$7500 per year, less than an average secretary makes sitting in an air conditioned office.

The national farm wage average was \$4.12, up 43 cents from 1980.

But even when it comes to wage increases, Pennsylvania farm employers were stingy. Hired hands received an average 18 cents per hour increase over the last year. That's a six percent boost in times of 12 percent inflation.

Field workers received a whopping two cents per hour average increase. An offer like that has to be seen as an insult to the hired hand.

Surely a good combine operator, running a \$50,000 machine, is worth as much as a union scale trucker.

But those field workers, who average \$3.64 per hour, are well off compared to their fellows on livestock operations.

Livestock workers took home an average \$3.14 per hour, well below current minimum wage. Their only bright spot was they came up from deep in the financial cellar with gains from average wages of \$2.80 per hour last year.

Most painful is the realization that more enlightened farm managers are paying their employees a fair living wage. So, there must be some hired hands living well below the poverty line.

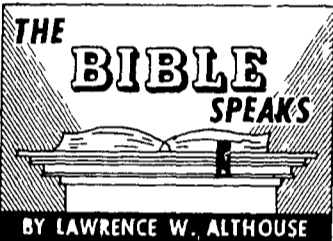
Is it any wonder, then, that it is

next to impossible for some farmers to get and keep good help?

The answer on some operations has been to put the children to work without compensation. Some observers, pointing to agriculture's exemption from child labor laws, claim this common practice is one step above slavery for one's own offspring.

While that is going too far in most cases, the results show up in a child's attitude toward farming. Is it any wonder, then, that so many of our young people flee the burden of hard work, long hours, and low pay for more attractive jobs?

The laborer is worthy of his hire. There can be no pride in U.S. agriculture's record as a food producer until the farm community learns to take care of its own members rather than have them suffer to the benefit of American's cheap food policy.



BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

### IS GOD FAIR? March 8, 1981

Background Scripture:  
Matthew 20

Devotional Reading:  
Leviticus 20:22-26

How would you feel if your employer were to pay you the same amount as he paid

a fellow employee doing the same task but for considerably fewer hours? I'm sure you'd be outraged at the employer's unfairness. I would.

That's what makes Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) so difficult for us. The householder in this parable seems utterly unjust — not to mention unwise — in the way he treats his workers. He hires workers at 8 a.m., 11 a.m., 1 p.m., and 3 p.m. Yet he pays them all the same wage! It is not hard to understand their angry response. These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal

to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat! I Choose To Give

But the reply of the householder puts the whole matter in a different light.

Friend, I am doing you no wrong, did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go" (20:13). The crux of the matter is, not that the longer-term workers were denied what they were promised, but that they begrudged the employer paying the short-term workers the same wage. I choose to give to this last as I gave to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose

with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? (20:15)

Yes, they did begrudge his generosity. Their unspoken charge of unfairness stemmed, not from any failure for him to keep his agreement with them, but in that they resented someone else getting what they did and for considerably fewer hours. Yes, they begrudged the householder's generosity and so would most of us — as secretly we may sometimes begrudge the grace of God freely given to those whom we would judge as being unworthy of the same salvation promised us.

Actually, Jesus is not talking about a householder in this parable, but God. He is not advocating that employers conduct their affairs as the householder in the parable, for the employer and the God of the universe do not stand on the same level. What the workers in the parable receive is not really a wage, but something more — something that goes considerably beyond what they deserve. What God 'pays' them, therefore, is not a wage, but grace. All of the workers would be due considerably less than they were paid if they received only what they were worth.

#### Beyond Fairness

It is not a matter, then, of God or the householder being 'fair' but of being gracious to all workers/children. None of us deserves the grace of God. Therefore, none of us has the right to begrudge that same grace being given to others. We are not able to judge as to whom should God bless and whom he should condemn.

Nothing is more self-condemning than for the person who is the beneficiary of God's grace to begrudge that same grace to someone else. God is not 'fair' (not by our standards, anyway), God is love.

## NOW IS THE TIME

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**TO USE WOOD.** Wood-burning stoves and fireplaces are popular at this time in order to save fuel costs. The ashes from wood are useful as a soil conditioner, and to some extent, as a fertilizer. These ashes will be alkaline, rather than acid, and therefore, should not be used near acid-loving plants such as azaleas, hollies, or rhododendrons. In addition, folks growing potatoes should not use wood ashes on that soil. However, for most other crops on the farm or in the garden, wood ashes will provide some potash and will help break down a heavy, clay-type soil. These ashes should be applied and worked into the topsoil before any planting is done.

**TO FILE INCOME TAX REPORT EARLY...** Why wait until April 15th to file your income tax report? One good answer might be for the person who has money to pay — put it off as long as possible. However, there are several good reasons to file early, many folks already have sent in

their report. If you are due a refund, the sooner you get that money and use it, or put to work, the better. In addition, when you file at the last minute you're more likely to rush and make mathematical mistakes. Also, it takes longer to get a refund when you are among the "big rush" at the deadline date. Income tax returns are expected from all of us and we might as well get the report made and sent in without penalty.

**TO BE CAREFUL WITH DISCARDED PESTICIDES...** What are you doing with left-over spray materials, or containers? These need special attention in order to prevent poisoning and pollution. In the first place, any left-over pesticide should be used as intended, if it is still legal to use. If not legal, you have a problem of disposal because it is unwanted everywhere. To bury it away from any water supply has been one suggestion. One thing that should not be done is to throw it into an old stone quarry or sink-hole. This will very likely get into someone's

water supply in the near future. Our state officials, such as DER, are looking for violators using this disposal system. Containers in which pesticides have been stored and now empty, should be punctured, or flattened so they cannot be used for any other purpose. This is very important to eliminate pesticide accidents. Be careful with all spray materials and containers.

**TO MANAGE SEPTIC TANKS...** The spring of the year is a very common time for septic tank trouble. No doubt this is due to the extra moisture in the drainage field area after snow melt and spring rains. In most cases the septic tank should be cleaned out every three to five years. This will depend upon the size of the family and the size of the tank. Drain fields need kept free of all shrub and tree plantings, the roots from these plants will seek out the moisture in the drain field and fill the area with additional roots. Willow trees are especially bad for clogging drain fields and cesspools. If both the septic tank and the drain field are kept in good condition, they should perform for years. However, a filled up septic tank will permit the solids to get out into the drain field area and clog the system. Good management should aim to prevent trouble rather than try to correct the trouble after it appears.

## HAY HAWS

