

BY CURT HARLER, EDITOR



Lancaster Farming says...

Do we really need USDA?

Every now and then it's a good idea to re-think some of the old "tried and true" ideas to be sure they still are valid and haven't become mindless prejudices

For years we cursed the spring stone-picking days and wondered why the stones kept coming up through the ground to cause us aching backs. Only later did it occur that the stones weren't coming up but the soil level was dropping as topsoil washed off the fields

Ever since the beginning of plowing contests, the prize has gone to the plowman who has plowed the longest, straightest furrow. Another major consideration was turning under all surface trash

Both practices now are recognized as less than optimum for best conservation farming

Then there's USDA — the farmers'

voice in Washington

Consider there's little that is done by USDA today that couldn't be done just as well by one of the other Cabinet positions

The lion's share of USDA's budget goes to food stamp programs which probably should be administered through Health, Education and Welfare

Rural assistance programs also would be more at home with HEW's social orientation than with Agriculture

Many of the financial and loan programs could easily be administered through the Commerce Department which is responsible for the other small businesses in this nation. Export programs, similarly, would not have to be duplicated by USDA but rather could find a home in an Agriculture Division under Commerce

Herbicide, insecticide, and other programs already are under the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA is responsible for clean streams and pollution control. Why not have the Soil Conservation Service and similar groups administered by EPA, too?

As it is today, only about 15 percent of USDA's budget goes for farmer programs. And a sizable chunk of that could be administered efficiently by other agencies

Budget cutters would be delighted with decreasing the funds needed to support phalanxes of high paid secretaries and administrators

Rather than having an adversary relationship, say between farmers and EPA, members of EPA would be arguing pro-farmer positions from within the organization. Such a move effectively could co-opt bureaucrats

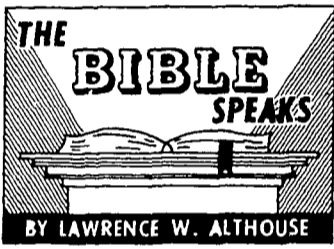
heretofore hostile to farm projects

Does a group representing less than four percent of the US population deserve a Cabinet post of its own?

Worthy farm programs that can't be handled on a state basis, like ag research, can find homes in a reorganized Department of the Interior which would assume other farm-related USDA roles and perhaps a new name like Department of Farm and Natural Resources

Is the need for USDA a cliché, or do farmers really need a separate department, along with its expensive bureaucracy, in Washington?

Political realities dictate solid answers to the questions above must be developed and proved or farmers will find themselves without a USDA in the relatively near future



ARE THESE "THE LAST DAYS"? March 22, 1981

Background Scripture:
Matthew 23 through 24:35
Devotional Reading:
Joshua 23:14-16
Years ago there was a humorous review on

Broadway called, "Beyond The Fringe." One of the sketches in this show was built around an anonymous religious group that had predicted that the "End of the World" was going to occur on a specific date. On that day the group assembled on a mountain to await the great cataclysm. As in chorus they counted down to the precise minute when their prophecy was to be fulfilled, nothing happened. For a few breathless minutes, actors and audience waited together in silence for something to happen. When at last it was apparent that nothing was

going to happen, the leader of the cult announced to his group, "Oh well, everybody back tomorrow at the same time!"

Not One Stone Upon Another

The humor in the sketch, of course, lay in the fact that the group was quite undeterred by the failure of their prophecy. They had their hearts set on the "End of the World" and nothing was going to take that glorious expectation away from them. There was also a sense in which we in the audience were laughing at ourselves, for we too are often infected with the same kind of arrogant confidence

that assumes we have some kind of "inside knowledge" of God's plan. History has been full of "Doomsday" groups.

Yet, these repeated failures of doomsday prophecy do not seem to have deterred today's prophets of doom and destruction. Books about the "End of the World" are very popular in the religious and general markets. Religious leaders today are still confidently — almost gleefully — telling us that we are in "the last days" before the world is utterly destroyed. And when we look at the symptoms all round,

who can help but wonder at times whether the sickness we see is not fatal and the clamor we hear is the "death rattle" of the world as we know it?

Yet, if we seriously study the symptoms — wars and rumors of war, nation against nation, famines and earthquakes, when has there not been a period in the world's history when these things were not so? When has not the follower of Christ known hatred, the church experienced a falling away of the fainthearted, and "false prophets" who arose and lead many astray?

Perhaps what we need to

concentrate upon in these somewhat confusing words of Jesus are not the signs of the end, but the counsel as to what we are to do in the meantime. See that you are not alarmed (24:6) and remember that he who endures to the end will be saved (24:13). For Jesus, despite all of his prophecies concerning the last days, did not commission his followers to preach a message of impending disaster, but the gospel of the kingdom, throughout the whole world.

Let God watch his calendar and determine the time of "the last days"

NOW IS THE TIME

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TO STEP ASIDE

Since I've been writing this weekly column for nearly 25 years, it seems a bit strange to be working on the final edition. However, due to the 44 years that I have been with the Penn State Extension Service in Lancaster County, I feel that it is time to make a change. We hope that you have become a regular reader of this column, and that it has been of value to you. Due to the wide circulation area, which I'm told reaches into a number of states, it is difficult to include current information for everyone. The main objective has been to present timely suggestions for farmers and gardeners in this part of Pennsylvania. To carry out this column, one of my co-workers, Jay Irwin, will continue to bring you helpful suggestions. For the rest of today's column, I'd like to leave you with a few parting thoughts.

TO KEEP INFORMED

Today's agriculture is a challenge to all of us to keep current with changing practices and regulations. We urge all

farmers to accept every opportunity of becoming better informed in their special field of endeavor. Many recommendations change from year to year, even month to month and in many cases it takes special effort to keep up to date. Most land-grant universities offer short courses, correspondence courses, and seminars for the benefit of farmers. All County Agents conduct meetings and demonstrations that are very practical; they use Extension Specialists to provide the latest information. The important thing is that you farmers accept these educational efforts as a source of dependable information.

TO PARTICIPATE

Over the years too many farmers have been reluctant to accept local government responsibilities, they felt they were too busy to go to the meetings in their community. I feel that it is very important that local farmers take part in township and county planning committees, zoning boards, etc. When this is done we get good agricultural input into the meeting and into

resulting regulations. When farmers choose not to participate, then other folks make the decisions for agriculture. In recent years many city and suburban families have moved into the country and these folks usually have a different viewpoint regarding various regulations. Some of their decisions may not represent practical and profitable agriculture. Don't have an inferiority complex — you can do it as well, or better, than the others.

TO BE PROUD

I've often heard folks say, "I'm just a farmer"...and it came out in an apologetic way. I surely hope that not many present farmers feel this way, because, in my opinion, it is a negative attitude and one that should not prevail. Farming is a very good profession and one of the most useful in the world. The production of food is vital, not only for our own people, but for needy families in other countries. Farming is a business today, and one requiring considerable expertise and management. I'd like to encourage all farmers to feel proud they are farmers and to know that the contribution of food and fiber is one of the most important professions in the world today. Our nation cannot get along without these products. Stand up for your rights and be proud that you are a farmer. God bless all of you.

HAY HAWS



Now that I'm using gasahol, I've got to quit idling the tractor in the barn and other closed areas.