



The phone rings constantly in the office of Les Houck, owner and farm director for Agri-broadcasting Network in New Holland. Houck cheerfully answers and keeps up-to-date on information which affects his daily programming of market prices.



Faye Houck is chief bookkeeper, business manager and jack-of-all trades. Here she works at the typewriter in the sunny offices of Agri-broadcasting.

Broadcasting network focuses on farmers

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

Should you sell your hay? Is this a good week to take those hogs to market? Are the corn prices up or down? Perhaps you've had the experience of being asked to jot down the latest market prices when they are broadcast by radio so your farm family can make some important economic decision.

If you have, chances are good that you may have gotten those prices from the Agri-broadcasting Network located in New Holland.

Les Houck, owner and farm director of Agri-broadcasting, explains that his network provides up-to-the minute market prices for established radio stations. He says, "We serve as farm broadcasters. Stations can't afford to hire someone to do that program, so we supply farm information."

The reports from Agri-broadcasting are primarily pricing because, as Houck explains, "We feel the farmer would like to know prices above everything else. Our main emphasis is on the Chicago Broad prices, livestock prices, cash grain prices with local prices in southeastern Pennsylvania, the Delmarva area and Maryland. Out of these markets he can draw a basis of the domestic need and the export need for grain."

Houck adds, "We are not a news network, so we have no need to report the news. We are all prices. Some farm networks are all editorial. But I like to know what the prices are and I get the feeling that farmers like to know what prices are."

The one exception Houck makes to the strictly price format is trying to provide background information on why prices are up or down, "to put things in perspective."

He stresses that while he is performing a service that no one else is providing to local stations, all the information he has is also available to them. It is a matter, of course, of their willingness to prepare farm broadcasts and to gather the information. "We can gather for all stations, and the cost per station is lower," he adds.

For that matter, Houck makes it clear that the information which he uses is also readily available to individual farmers. However, he points out, "He can make the phone calls, but he doesn't."

Houck feels the radio is an important tool for farmers, saying, "Radio is a companion - you take it with you. This time of the year farmers can keep track of prices as they listen to the radio in the tractor cabs or as they grade eggs."

But farmers are not the only listeners. Houck states, "Many people not connected to farming say they like to listen to my reports because we move through so many items so fast. Because of the length of the programs we can't take long, drawn-out events."

Most of the reports from Agri-broadcasting are three minutes in length, with a few shorter and some longer. The reports are carried basically at two times during the day: early (very early) morning and noon. He says, "Our early morning program is a summary of the day before - it is old news." About 10:30 the office gears up for the noon reports and then later in the afternoon they record updates on those programs.

There are several basic reports Houck makes each day, including a dairy report, livestock, livestock and grain, grain and strictly cash grain. These reports are updates throughout the day and are regionalized to some extent so that those being aired in the Delmarva area, for instance, carry prices local to that area.

Houck says, "We do about 15 different programs. We may do the same one over and change the cash grain prices." Ninety percent of the broadcasts are recorded by Houck, with Associate Farm Director Ken Brubaker preparing

and reporting when he, Houck, is unavailable. There are five employees working at Agri-broadcasting.

All reports are recorded in the New Holland studio on cassette tapes and sent via telephone to the participating stations. When Houck began with the network in 1976 there were nine stations ac-

and what some may consider an inside track, it is not uncommon for him to be asked for advice about buying and selling. While he is always willing to talk, understandably he maintains that he is very reluctant to give advice which can affect a man's financial position. He explains, "What is good for one farmer may be en-

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cepting his broadcasts. That number has risen to 39, covering the entire state of Pennsylvania, parts of Maryland and New Jersey.

Ideally, Houck likes to have just one station in an area carry his broadcasts and he adds, "We are trying to hold expansion because I feel we could be doing a better job on some of the programming. We always strive for better quality." He mentions that broadcasts are most widely accepted in areas where there are lots of farmers. He contrasts conditions in the east with those in the midwest where whole cities revolve around the farm.

"Here," he states, "We're pushed because so many other things take precedence over agriculture."

As he sits in his Main Street, New Holland, office, he looks out and comments that New Holland is an example of a town where the importance of agriculture can be readily seen, with a steady stream of cattle trucks and hay wagons driving through the town. He notes, however, that this is not typical for most towns in this heavily populated part of the state.

Houck feels his location in New Holland is appropriate with the many influential markets close by. He says, "We're fortunate being located here because prices here tend to be representative both for domestic use and export use. Most grain prices are set off what we're reporting."

It is quite evident as the conversation goes on that Les Houck has a very intimate knowledge and understanding of markets, futures, commodities and all those items which go into the pricing of farm products both domestically and for export. Because of this knowledge

and what some may consider an inside track, it is not uncommon for him to be asked for advice about buying and selling. While he is always willing to talk, understandably he maintains that he is very reluctant to give advice which can affect a man's financial position. He explains, "What is good for one farmer may be en-

How does Houck get the latest in prices? He has a wire service machine, Commodity News Service, Inc., which ticks off the latest information from the Chicago Board of Trade and national livestock prices. He adds, "We make calls. We call local markets and local USDA." He says these places accept their calls for the latest prices and that they cooperate fully.

Asked if he ever gets response from his listeners, Houck replies, "Some tell me they are really dedicated listeners and record the prices daily. It's part of their daily record keeping. A lot of farmers say they have their wives record the price for them."

Houck is very tuned into the business of farming, perhaps because he grew up on a dairy farm in Paradise and continues to love the land. He says, "It is the greatest feeling in the world to be plowing and planting." With his love of farming, it is no surprise that he enjoys keeping close contacts with farmers.

He says, "I go to the local markets to see farmers and to hear the auctioneers work." He also does some public speaking, explaining, "I like to talk to farm groups about grain. I strive to get to know farmers."

Although Houck's name is recognized fairly easily in a group of farmers, he is not instantly recognized in person, something which is alright with him because he enjoys the anonymity of visiting with farmers just for the joy of it.

Another way he likes to meet the

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Using the latest in technology, Houck talks into the microphone recording his reports on cassettes which are played through the telephone for participating stations. He makes

up to 15 programs daily, updating and changing as needed to reflect the latest in the markets.