

Letters To The Editor

Cornucopia counterpoint

In a June 6 letter to Lancaster Farming, Eugene Gayman of the Pennsylvania Farmer's Association called our Cornucopia Project study of the Pennsylvania food system "wishful thinking," and accused us of wanting to "turn back the clock hundreds of years" because we suggest that Pennsylvania needs to become more self-sufficient in food production.

Aside from his misunderstanding of our report, it is Gayman's thinking that is outdated.

Under the present system, we buy food products from other states, and they buy from us. There is nothing wrong with this method, in theory and, to a limited extent it will certainly continue. But in practice, the current system is terribly wasteful of energy, and a bad economic bargain for Pennsylvania and its farmers.

Our study showed Pennsylvania imports over 70 percent of its food. Last year we spent \$8.4 billion on food from outside the state, with more than \$400 million paying just for transportation. By contrast, we

sold only \$1.9 billion worth of Pennsylvania food products to other states. So our food system ends up being a major drain on the state economy.

Because so much food moves across the country, our system is energy intensive. For every \$2 we spend on energy to grow food, we spend another dollar on energy to move it around. Shipping food doesn't improve its quality, but it does increase the price. It costs about \$4, for example, to grow a box of California lettuce, but we pay at least \$4 more just to get it here.

By letting other states produce most of our meat, vegetables, and fruits, we also put ourselves in a vulnerable position. A transport strike, energy shortage, or fruit fly epidemic could cut us off from essential food.

To suggest the Pennsylvania farmer be given a better break when competing against the subsidized agricultural systems of other states, to point out that the Pennsylvania farmer and consumer would be better off if more

of our food were produced in-state, is not turning the clock back but dealing with present day economic realities. It is curious to us how someone purporting to represent Pennsylvania farmers and their best interests would be so interested in maintaining the present system — wherein the Pennsylvania farmer is distinctly disadvantaged.

Ten years ago, U.S. automakers were riding high, earning billions by selling big, inefficient cars. When some people warned of a coming energy shortage, the car companies responded by saying "we've always done it this way." Then the gas crisis hit, and now we have a stricken industry — Chrysler is on welfare, Ford and GM are struggling, and sales of small import cars are higher than ever.

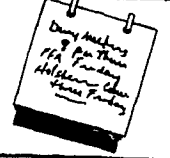
Gayman wants to ignore the reality of a changed world, where oil prices will only go up, and supplies will always be limited. Our current food system made sense when gasoline was plentiful and cheap, but it doesn't any longer.

Pennsylvania will never be totally food self-sufficient, and we don't recommend that as a goal. But we think it makes good sense to do all we can to preserve our farms and farmland, increase our self-reliance, and have a system that is as energy-efficient as possible.

Medard Gabel
Director
The Cornucopia Project



Farm Calendar



Saturday, August 1

Western Pa. Holstein Show, Bulter.

PA Nut Growers Picnic, Miles Nolt Farm, Manheim, open to the public, all day long, for more information phone: 685-5760.

PA Beekeepers Summer Picnic and Meeting, Lighthouse Youth Center, South of Chambersburg, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

York County 4-H Horse Roundup and the Official Opening of Spring Valley Park, Shrewsbury, 9 a.m.

Sussex County New Jersey Farm and Horse Show, through August 9.

Adams 4-H Swine Show & Sale, show begins at 8 a.m., sale at 7 p.m., South Mountain Fairgrounds.

Sunday, August 2

Soil Conservation Society of America's 36th Annual meeting, Sheraton Spokane, Spokane, Washington, continues through Wednesday.

Union County West End Fair, Laurelton, until Wednesday.

Monday, August 3

Inter-State Milk Cooperative member picnic, Dorney Park, Allentown.

Morrison Cove Dairy Show, Martinsburg, until Friday.

Clearfield County Fair, Clearfield, until Saturday.

Stanton Community Fair, New Stanton, until Saturday.

Intensive Alcohol-Fuel Workshops, Wilson College Campus, Chambersburg, until Friday.

Tuesday, August 4

Pork Value Conference, Marriott Hotel, Des Moines, Iowa, continues tomorrow.

Lancaster County Guernsey Breeders Field Day, Romella Farms, 10:30 a.m., for more information contact Ken Garber, 717/464-2894.

Twilight tour, Alfalfa weed demonstration/research plot, Everett Basham Farm, Cecil County, MD., 7:30 p.m.

Lancaster County Farm Women Picnic, Lampeter Community Grounds.

Lebanon County Holstein Field Day, 7 p.m. Harvey Bomgardner Farm.

Wednesday, August 5

Lancaster Conservation District Monthly Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Farm and Home Center

Delaware Ag Progress Day, University of Delaware Experimental Farm, Newark, De., 4-8:30 p.m.

4-H Achievement Fair, Flemington County New Jersey Fairgrounds through Saturday, for more information contact 201/788-1340.

Berks County FFA Market Hog Show and Sale at Leesport Auction, Show at 10 a.m., sale at 6 p.m.

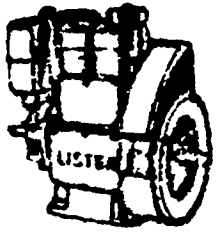
Thursday, August 6

Dauphin County 4-H Round-up, Farm Show Complex, 8-10:30 a.m., continues Friday and Saturday.

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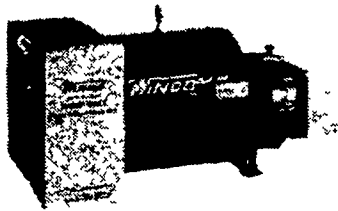
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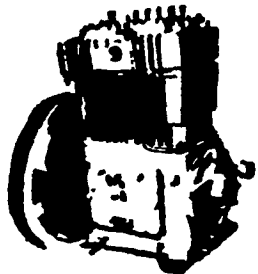
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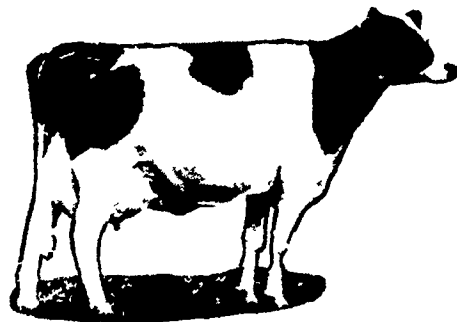
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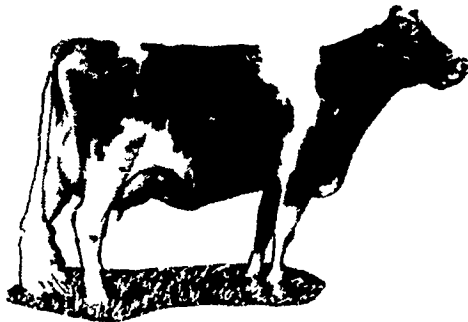
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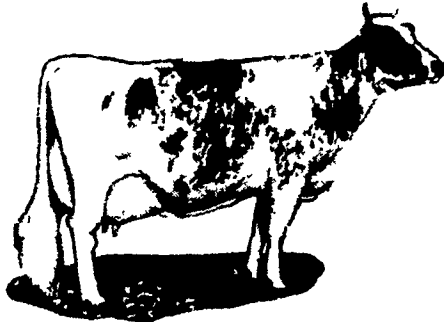
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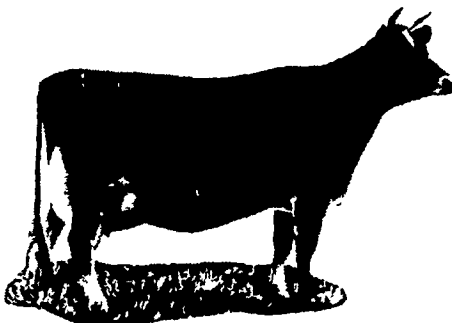


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