

Berks Chamber meets farm issues face to face

BY LAUREL SCHAEFFER
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LEESPORT — Members of the Berks County Chamber of Commerce met with approximately 36 agri-business leaders of Berks County recently here at the County Agricultural Center in an effort to build a bridge of understanding, unify, and compete together against outside business interests instead of competing against each other.

The Chamber expressed a

renewed interest in the problems and concerns of Berks County farmers and agri-business leaders. The meeting was planned to bring to light the problems facing the agri-business community giving all participants a chance to voice their concerns. The Chamber of Commerce then plans to identify and select a few good, common and attainable goal and work with the agri-business community to achieve these goals.

Major concerns noted most

frequently by the participants were: farmland preservation, high interest rates, lack of public concern, school taxes, and marketing.

Tony Grimm, president of the Chamber of Commerce explained that a smaller committee consisting of several agri-business leaders, farmers and Chamber of Commerce members would take the ideas, discuss them, identify an area to work on and then report back to the larger, "idea" group

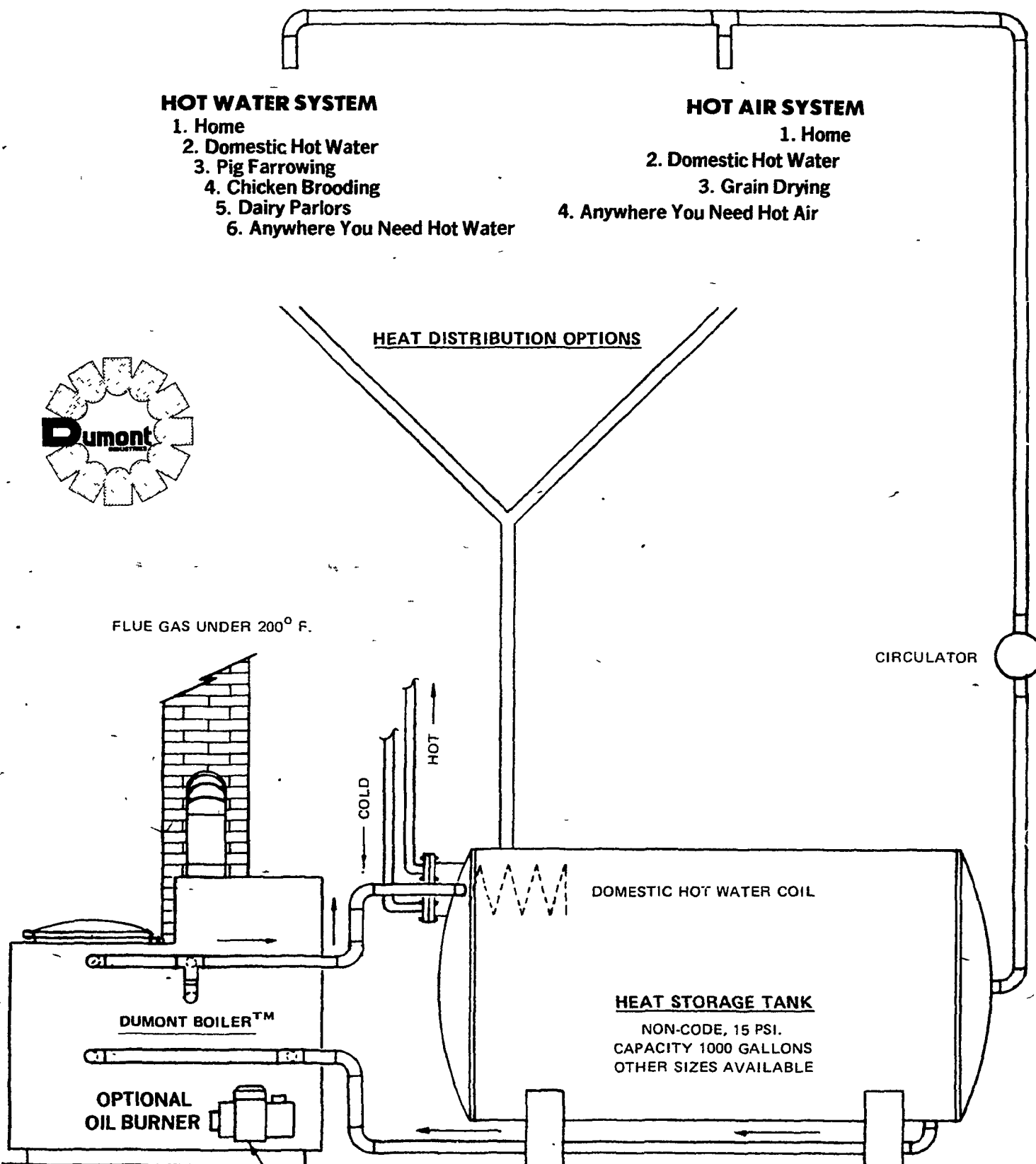
which was assembled at this meeting.

Clyde Myers, Berks County Extension Agent noted how important agriculture is to the strength of the economy. Myers told the group that agriculture encompasses 24 percent of the nation's gross national product, and 23 percent of it's employment force. He also said there are two million farmers, or three percent of the labor force, farming about

one-half the total land area of the United States.

Myers also told the group that American consumers are currently spending only 17 to 19 percent of their income on food while the French spend 26 percent; Brazilians spend 42 percent; and Russians must spend 52 percent of their income on food. The county agent noted that 25 percent of American's food bill is not spent for food and 30 percent of their food dollars are spent in restaurants.

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