

Perry County study eyes ag land protection

NEW BLOOMFIELD — Just how important is agriculture to Perry County?

The comparison of just one economic statistic amply illustrates farming's importance to the largely rural county northwest of Harrisburg.

The value of products from the county's 175 dairy farms — just one segment of Perry's total agriculture — tops \$14 million.

In comparison, production in the county's largest non-agricultural industry, apparel manufacturing, is valued at less than half that figure, or about \$5.6 million.

In a nutshell, this comparison illustrates why the Perry Conservation District has published an extensive study entitled "Agricultural Land Protection" and is staging an explanatory slide program to explain the need for such protection and preservation to various citizen groups throughout the county.

The study, prepared by Ted Furry, Executive Assistant of the Perry Conservation District, basically spells out an inventory of agriculture in the county, outlines methods and techniques of agricultural land protection that are available and recommends certain public participation that is needed to bring about such protection.

Under the ag inventory, the study points out that the number of farms in the county dropped from more than 1,600 in 1954 to 734 in 1978. And, during the same period, the total acreage of farmland decreased from 180,000 to 123,000.

As the slide program states:

"The time to save our good land for agriculture is now. Population has increased in all 21 townships, assessments have increased but the acres of farmland has decreased. For some townships, planning for continued farm development is already too late to protect the better land."

Average population density in the county has increased to about 60 people per square mile.

The study points to those townships in Perry which have the lower population densities which have a greater potential for agriculture. These include such townships as Jackson, Madison, Centre, Spring, Miller and Tyrone.

Among the possible ag land protection measures that are available, as cited in the study, are the various measures passed by the State Legislature in recent years, zoning and deed restriction.

Under recommendations, the study urges that local municipalities in the county:

—Develop and maintain public support in favor of ag land protection.

—Establish the importance of agriculture in each of the municipalities.

—Locate and identify essential agricultural lands.

—Create fair and equitable regulatory policies.

The protection of farmland in Perry has already received significant public sentiment in the county.

In 1979, at a public meeting in

New Bloomfield the number one concern was the loss of farmland.

A survey also showed that some 80 percent of people in the county feel that the preservation of farmland will require a high priority in the coming decade.

And, as the Perry Conservation District's explanatory slide

program concludes:

"The recent economic conditions of increased interest rates and the inflationary petroleum prices have accomplished almost overnight in Perry County a controlled growth movement.

"A time to catch our breath.

"Will Perry County in future

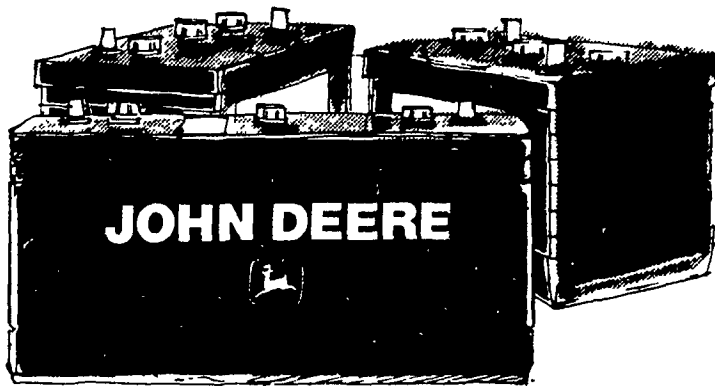
years have a planned agricultural community in a rural-urban environment?"

"Or will Perry County have a sprawl type development of houses?"

"The choice lies with the resident people and the local governments."—DA

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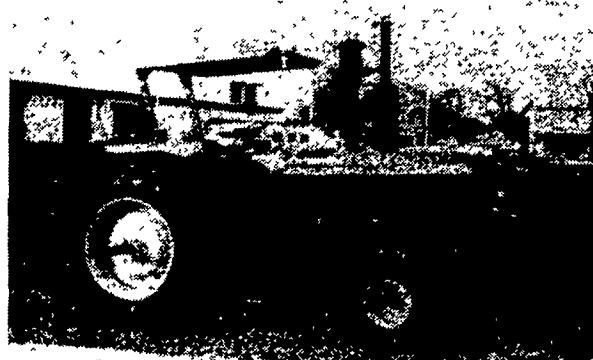
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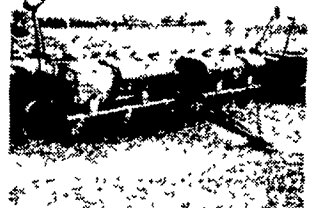
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