



# Off the Sounding Board

By Sheila Miller, Editor

## Comments on conservation

Did you ever want to give the federal government a piece of your mind about the way they are running things?

Until January 15, 1982, every farmer and person living in the U.S. will have the chance to tell one branch of the federal government just what they think.

As part of the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 the United States Department of Agriculture has been listening to public comments on its conservation programs since 1978. Now, for the fourth time, USDA is asking for feedback from the people it is intended to serve.

To help people respond to the appeal for opinion-poll support for its program direction, the USDA has conveniently drawn up a questionnaire on which a flick of a pen will check an individual's attitude on 20 issues, with the options of 'strong support' all the way down to 'strong opposition.'

We think its awfully considerate of the bureaucrats to come up with these guidelines to issues they say have been based on previous opinion surveys. Unfortunately, the bureaucratic language seems to filter down even to the simplest questionnaire.

Take, for example, Question 18 which reads "Minimizing conflicts among features of USDA farm programs that limit achievement of conservation objectives." How can anyone feel strongly one way or another on this sort of question? What type of conflicts are they talking about, which farm programs, and whose conservation objectives?

Most of the other questions on Secretary John Block's list of preferred Soil and Water Resource Conservation Program issues are decipherable, but merit second and sometimes third readings.

We should all agree that there's a strong need to establish a clear national priority list of conservation problems (Question 1), but who's going to write them down — the bureaucrat who drew up this questionnaire? That would throw out any possibility of clearness.

And the idea of strengthening the partnerships that exist between landowners and all levels of government is idealistically a grand idea (Question 2). But how can this 'dream' come true when even within the ranks of the current administration, a sense of unity seems to be lacking.

One cleverly phrased question might throw some people off track, but not many. The USDA asks whether the public would be in favor of "providing federal matching block grants to states by reducing federal conservation programs." (Question 3) At first glance this looks like a bonus to individual states — the federal government agrees to "provide" matching funds. But a closer look tells us these funds will mean a much smaller federal share, with the states having to pick up half of the tab that USDA used to pay. And what would happen to the conservation program in a state that simply couldn't come up with the money. Their conservation problems would be addressed with 'short change.'

The questionnaire suggests coordination at the local level of USDA agencies, conservation

districts, Extension committees, and others (Question 4) This we agree would be a terrific change for the better so that there is a common goal and effort at the grassroots level of the conservation problem — down on the farm.

But, the "Preferred Program" takes this one step further on the state and national level and gives birth to new branches of bureaucracy.

Unless the public shows strong opposition to Questions 6-8. USDA will work toward establishing a new State Conservation Coordinating Board that will be politically appointed by each state's governor. Pennsylvania already has its Bureau of Soil and Water Conservation within the Department of Environmental Resources and this agency works with local conservation districts and the USDA agencies in overall planning of conservation programs. Who needs an identical twin?

The USDA also proposes a National Conservation Board. Didn't they ever hear that too many cooks spoiled the soup. There's already too much talk and not enough action in solving the erosion and flooding crisis taking place on U.S. land.

Ideas of emphasizing cost-efficient conservation practices, (Question 11) are a must in today's weak economy — nobody has money to burn. But targeting more USDA funds and personnel to areas where erosion or other conditions threaten the production capacity of soil and water resources (Question 10) could mean problems in little (but mighty) states like Pennsylvania would be deemed insignificant in relation to problems being experienced by states like Texas, California, and Montana.

And one of the last proposals the USDA is inviting people to comment on is the controversial idea of cross-compliance — "requiring land owners to have a conservation plan in order to be eligible for Farmers Home Administration loans. (Question 16) What if the farmer's loan is for livestock or crops on leased land?

It's time USDA got down to the ground level of their conservation program and put its personnel and technical resources where it counts — out on the farm, working with farmers in solving erosion and surface water problems. Research and education are an important part of the progress our nation can make it saving its valuable soil, but all the USDA scientists and information specialists in the nation won't have any jobs if farmers aren't 'buying' what they're selling.

In order to feed the world as cheaply as our political leaders prefer, farmers need the government's and taxpayers financial support in their conservation efforts. It's no time for the federal government to call for more programs and practices for half the funds.

But it is time for farmers everywhere to speak up, either by using the questionnaire or preferably writing a personal letter filled from top to bottom with ideas on what would make USDA's conservation program earn its keep. It only takes your time and concern, and of course that 20-cent stamp.

## OUR READERS WRITE, AND OTHER OPINIONS

### Qualified support

The Berks County Conservation District has given qualified support to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's new proposed conservation program.

The board of directors feels the

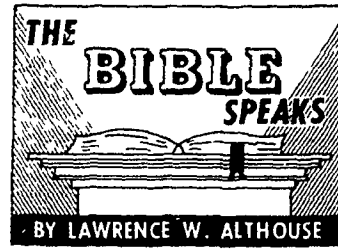
program is a move in the right direction. But, exception is being taken with several features of the new program.

The board is opposing the establishment of local and state

coordinating committees. This will mean the creation of a new system and will duplicate the present State Soil and Water Conservation Commission as well as all the local county conservation districts.

The provision of the new proposed program, which provides

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### THE MANGER SIGN December 20, 1981

Background Scripture:

Luke 2:1-20.

Devotional Reading:

Philippians 1:3-11.

If the cross is the symbol of Christ's passion and resurrection, the manger is surely the symbol of his birth. According to Luke's Gospel, the symbolism has a divine origin, for the angel that appeared to the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem said very specifically: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (2: 12). It was God himself who placed his manger sign upon the earth. Saviour, Christ, Lord!

What is the meaning of that sign for us?

For one answer to that question,

imagine in your mind's eye an old-fashioned balance scale. On the right-hand side of the scale, imagine in large, bold letters these three words: SAVIOUR, CHRIST, LORD. Then on the left-hand side imagine the manger sign. Most of us will imagine that the scale is greatly out of balance, the right side with Jesus' three lofty titles — SAVIOUR, CHRIST, LORD — being so much weightier than the left side with its simple manger.

In other words, there is a tremendous paradoxical irony in Luke's story of Jesus' birth. On the one hand the shepherds in the field are told that God has finally answered Israel's prayers and given them one who is SAVIOUR, CHRIST, and LORD, all in one! What a powerful, earthshaking announcement it was.

Yet, at the same time, the God-given sign of this great event was almost unbelievable: A manger, not a crib for a newborn child — let alone this newborn child — but a feed-trough for common animals! What could be more inappropriate, even incongruous? The one who is God's SAVIOUR, CHRIST and LORD born in a feed-trough!

Yet more than just the crude manger itself is what it symbolizes. For the manger stands for the most humble of cir-

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## NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin

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### To Be Aware of Fertilizer Value of Manure

The 1982 Agronomy Guide lists, on page 7, the real fertilizer value in our livestock and poultry manure. As fertilizer costs increase, we need to make every effort to use and preserve these manure fertilizer elements. On the basis of the fertilizer content at current fertilizer prices, cattle manure has \$3.00 worth of fertilizer elements per ton, swine manure contains about \$5.00 worth and poultry manure contains about \$20.00 worth of fertilizer elements. This will vary depending on the moisture and bedding content. In addition, all types of manure add organic matter to the soil which is needed on most farms. For best results manure should be either

incorporated into the topsoil or stored in a water-tight pit until it can be spread and mixed with the soil.

### To Be Alert for LT in Poultry

Poultry farmers should be on the look-out — LT (laryngotracheitis) is on the prowl again. Several cases have been confirmed. Let's not be lulled to sleep with the fact that LT has been held in check for awhile. We are into the season with less sunshine and more opportunity for the disease to spread.

Health security is most important. Insist that salesmen, feed deliverymen, egg customers, and pick-up people stay out of the poultry house. It's also a good idea to provide OUTSIDE receptacles for feed slips, invoices and other

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## HAY HAWS



"You can't be taking a poll! Elections are over. No politician cares now what farmers think."