



# Off the Sounding Board

By Sheila Miller, Editor

## Picking up the pork I.D. tab

Once again, it looks as if the farmer is going to be left footing the bill for another bureaucratic regulation.

This time, though, the only farmers who will be paying through the nose will be Pennsylvania hog producers.

That is, unless something is done to stop proposed rules for identifying swine from winding its way through the Harrisburg lawmaking process and into our lives.

Just last week at the Keystone Pork Congress, chief veterinarian for the state's Bureau of Animal Industry, Max Van Buskirk outlined what these proposed regs would mean. After he finished his explanation, most of the assembled hog producers were still confused about what this new identification rule would mean to them.

Just like the farmers, we feel there is a need to mark hogs so that they can be traced from farm to rail. We've got too many problems with diseases and mismanagement not to think this would be a great idea for the swine industry.

What we don't like is where the cost of this type of I.D. program will come from.

Packers and auction barns have already voiced their opposition to the state if the cost of this identification requirement would fall on them. They don't want the hassles of catching hogs and tattooing them as they run through the sales barn or are unloaded at the plant.

Instead, they're saying "Let the farmers do the marking." And if the farmer doesn't do it, what then? In answer, the auction barns and packing plants can refuse to take the hogs.

That sounds like a pure case of discrimination to us.

Right now, without the means of identification, the cost of any hog that's condemned at the packing plant by B.A.I. inspectors falls on the packer. In turn, the packer adjusts the price of pork to help make up the loss.

Once they've been burned by a load of hogs carrying problem porkers, the packers are justifiably hesitant to go back to a particular auction or farm to pick up another load of 'lemons.' So they quit buying from questionable sources.

But the point still remains that these volume buyers can better afford the cost of a program that will ultimately benefit them by identifying and weeding out hogs that are harboring tuberculosis or other condemnable diseases. The farmers, who are and have been running close to break-even for so long, just can't handle another cost.

The only way an identification program would pay at the farm is if packers and auction barns reimburse the producers with a premium price. Hogs that come into the plant or auction barn with tattoo in place would obviously save managers time and money since they wouldn't have to handle the

operation. So the savings should be passed on to the farmer.

No one's arguing that the idea of identification and trace back is not a good one. With contagious diseases floating around Pennsylvania's perimeters, a system of knowing where problems such as pseudorabies and tuberculosis are coming from would be invaluable. Once in place, the I.D. program would provide a compass for veterinarians to follow if diseases like cholera or African swine fever ever cropped up within the borders of the Keystone state.

But there are too many loose ends that need to be tied before this system would prove worthy of the extra expense it would mean to farmers in terms of time.

The way the proposed regulations are written, they rely on the auction barns to keep accurate records of registered farm numbers for each lot of hogs purchased and sold. But what about those hogs that are sold private treaty? Who has to keep records on those sales?

Let's not forget that a hog's ear can hold only so many tattoos, too. Depending on how many times a hog is sold from the time it's born until it meets its maker at the packing plant, it's ear markings would be about as legible to the veterinarian as a braille page is to a sighted person.

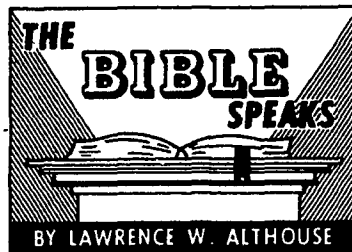
Of course there's always the alternative of the slap tattoo placed on the hog's back. But on colored hogs, the only time these marks can be seen is after the hog is skinned. What happens if a tattoo was missed along the way to market?

Accurate records or good memories seem to be the basis for this program's success. Except in the case of licensed auctions, packers, and buyers, the entire program hinges on the honor system. The state can revoke commercial licenses, but so far there's been no permit requirement devised by our state's legislators for producing hogs. All it takes now is a farmer who loves to live dangerously — most times on the brink of economic disaster.

Give hog producers a monetary incentive to mark their hogs and they'll do it. And this marking idea shouldn't stop at the packing plant.

We agree with many producers that if Pennsylvania farmers have to go to all this trouble to prove they're raising a quality product, this recognition should be evident when consumers select a pack of pork chops from the meat cooler in a store. Don't just mix in the Pennsylvania pork with out-of-state imports where the quality control measures don't exist.

Pennsylvania pork producers shouldn't have to foot the bill for an I.D. program that will be used as a profit-making tool by packers, and as a disease-tracing tool by veterinarians. This is one tab that the farmer can't afford to pay.



ONLY GOD KNOWS  
February 28, 1982

**Background Scripture:**

Mark 13:24-37;  
Luke 21:25-32.

**Devotional Reading:**  
Psalms 119:113-125.

The latter portion of Mark 13 is one of the hardest portions of the gospels for us to understand. Jesus warns of both dark days ahead and "the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (13:26). The vision is concluded with this picture: "And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (13:27).

What is really confusing to us is the statement that: "this generation will not pass away before all these things take place" (13:30). How shall we understand this? We know that "these things" have not taken place yet, let alone within "this generation" (referring, of course, to those who heard him).

**Only The Father**

On the basis of those words many Christians have claimed to know precisely when the promises were to be fulfilled. To date, all of these predictions have proven to be in error, although almost every day we read of another group or prophet warning us of the eminent demise of the world.

We can spend hours and hours speculating and arguing over the words or we can concentrate on the words we do understand: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (13:32). If Mark 13 can teach us anything it is the truth of that statement. Only God knows when and how those promises will be fulfilled. It is therefore fruitless for us to continue to dispute and speculate on this subject.

The purpose of Christ's warning about the "Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory" is, not to make the church a debating society, but to keep the followers of Christ vigilant to the judgment of God in Christ. The key to this whole passage is found in this admonition: "Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come" (13:33). In other words, we are to live our lives as if the day of judgment and the return of Christ were likely to be this afternoon. Then we will be motivated to do what he has commanded.

**Lest You Be Found Asleep**

The proper activity of the followers of Christ will not be passive waiting upon some mountaintop, but active discipleship and witness after the example which Christ set before us. We are to be vigilant "lest he come suddenly and find you asleep" (13:36). To be found "asleep," is not to be physically asleep, but spiritually. If we are spiritually awake and alert, we will be found by him in the midst of the work of his kingdom. We will be ministering to the needs of others; we will be witnessing, not to the bad news of Armageddon, but the Good News of God's redeeming love in Christ Jesus.

## OUR READERS WRITE, AND OTHER OPINIONS

### Faulty diagnosis?

Regarding your editorial "Jet-lag woes for wheat growers" in the Feb. 20 issue of Lancaster Farming that was critical of Secretary John Block, you made some misleading statements about the wheat crop and sales.

You asked "Doesn't he know

most of the wheat crop was in the ground by October 1981?" Don't you know a large percentage of the wheat crop is spring wheat?

Don't you know the only way to reduce a surplus is to cut

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## HAY HAWS



"According to what you charge for a ham sandwich, I've got a hog that's worth \$3060."

## NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin

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**Use Quality Seed**

Many people are making plans for the 1982 growing season. In these plans, we should be preparing to use the very best quality seeds possible. Leftover seeds may be satisfactory if properly stored. If they are certified or top quality seed to start with, it would be a good idea to run a germination test to be certain

they will grow. This can be done with the old but still effective "Rag Doll" method (wrapping seeds in rolled up moist rags) or by placing seeds in a dish on wet paper towels, cover with plastic, and keep in a warm place for at least 10 days. If these seeds do not grow under either of these tests, don't rely on them for your crop. Certified seed may cost a little

more in the beginning, but usually is worth the difference. **To Be Aware of Alkaline Water For Pesticides**

If your water is alkaline, especially if the pH is 8 or greater, you may have trouble getting good results from the pesticide spray material you are using on cropland. Water supplies in many

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