

In dairy, poultry, beef, hogs, corn

# Lancaster County, still Number One

**LANCASTER** — Lancaster County is still number one in the state when it comes to agriculture, being the leader in dairy, poultry, beef cattle, hogs, and field crops.

For the first time in its traceable history, Lancaster County topped the 110 bushel per acre barrier for corn production according to 1981 figures. County Extension Agent Jay Irwin reported Wednesday the average yield for the golden maize came in at 112 bushels to the acre — the highest yields recorded in the entire state.

According to Irwin, part of the reason for this outstanding corn production that tops the state average by 16 bushels per acre was the excellent growing conditions experienced last summer. And last year more farmers cashed in on corn by planting a total of 135,600 acres, two-thirds of the total field crop acreage in the county. Unfortunately, the cash value of the crop, \$39,497,300, was far less than the \$44,808,000 value of 1980's sparser crop. That year, due mostly to drought, Lancaster County's 132,000 acres of corn only yielded an average of 85.9 bushels.

One of the reasons farmers are planting more corn, despite the lower cash value, said Irwin, is because of another record gain in the county — dairy cow numbers. In 1981, the number of dairy cows in Lancaster County climbed to a new high of 101,900 cows — up from the 94,000 level record in 1980. The additional corn acres are used to help feed these dairy animals, along with the county's other livestock. And despite the record yields and acres planted, the county remains a deficit area for

corn — buying large quantities of the grain.

Of course, most of the corn that's fed to dairy cattle is in the form of corn silage. Here, too, Lancaster County farmers set a new standard for farmers around the state. Their 1981 figures for silage production per acre exceeded the state's 16.2 tons per acre average by almost five tons. The new "yardstick" for top silage production is 20.9 tons to the acre.

Because of their higher yields, Lancaster farmers were able to cut back their acres of corn harvested for silage to 66,200 from 1980's 68,700 acres.

With better management and better quality feed, the county's dairy cows pumped out their own records last year, bringing the average production level to 13,200 pounds per cow — up 700 pounds from the previous year and 800 pounds over the state average.

When asked why Lancaster's better-than-average dairy farmers would add more cows to their herds and push for greater production in the face of milk surpluses, Irwin commented, "The dairy farmer had to increase in order to keep his head above water." He cited figures which showed certain dairy farmers earning \$22,000 less than two years ago due to increased interest costs, cutbacks in price support, and greater expenses.

"The dairy farmer was caught in a bind," Irwin said. "To stay in business, he had to be more efficient through closer culling, fine-tuned breeding, better feeding programs, and tighter management control. And he had

to increase production by adding cows."

Even though the county's 1,850 dairy farms (down 25 from 1980) have suffered economic setbacks, along with the other members of the agricultural community, the dairy industry still represents almost a \$200 million business, experiencing its greatest value increase last year when it jumped from \$163,055,000 (1980) to \$195,017,000.

Comparing Lancaster County to other counties in Pennsylvania, a wide margin exists between the top two dairying counties. Coming in second, with 44,000 cows is Bradford County, whose dollar values total \$75,870,000. Franklin County comes in third, with 40,300 cows and a dairy industry value of \$78 million. Following in fourth place is Chester County, with Berks claiming fifth.

Other agricultural industries which play major roles both in Lancaster County and the state are led by the county's poultry industry which has kept its number one ranking in Pennsylvania with a total value of \$167,471,500. This figure includes broilers (\$52,114,000), layers (\$103,895,000), and others, including started pullets and turkeys (\$11,462,500).

Lancaster farmers raise 37 percent of the state's broilers, reported Irwin, and house 48.3 percent of all the laying chickens in the state.

One area where the county realized a dramatic decrease in numbers last year was in the hog industry. In contrast to 1980's figure of 337,000 hogs in the county,

Lancaster's 1,800 hog farmers only reported 256,000 head last year.

When asked if the pseudorabies virus might have had an effect on the hog numbers, Irwin shrugged off FRV as a factor since it only affected 70 farms at its peak. Instead he blamed lower market prices as the influencing factor. Despite the decrease in numbers, however, Lancaster County tops the list in hog production. It also remains on top in beef cattle production with 256,000 head (unchanged from 1980), but ranks third in sheep, with 7,500 head (up 1,500 head from 1980).

Irwin reported Lancaster farmers experienced a decrease in wheat yields last year due to scab, harvesting 41 bushels per acre compared to 42.9 bushels per acre in 1980. Barley, oats, and potatoes were harvested with greater yields in 1981 — 64 bushels per acre for barley, 69 bushels per acre for oats, and 290 hundredweight for potatoes.

One of the surprising statistics Irwin reported was the tobacco figures for 1981. He quoted a total value of \$20,122,400 for last year's crop, but quickly qualified that figure by explaining it reflects the value of the crop whether it's sold or "hanging in the shed." Faced with the situation of unsold tobacco, Irwin said many county tobacco farmers reduced their acreage this year. But what has been planted, "looks like a good crop," he said.

Summing up the year, Irwin noted Lancaster farmers "took a close look at their balance sheets in 1981 and paid closer attention to

their fertilizer and machinery costs." He pointed out more farmers considered the fertilizer value of their livestock manure as one cost-cutting measure. Using the manure and incorporating it safely into cropland fields, Irwin warned, is an area of concern that will need to be studied in the near future.

Farming in Lancaster County is big business, stressed Irwin. Last year the county surpassed the \$700 million mark in value of agricultural products for the first time. And, only one year before, the \$600 million milestone was passed.

Irwin concluded by noting some of the credit for agriculture's success in Lancaster County can be attributed to the support of allied industries. —SM

## Record harvest

**UNIVERSITY PARK** — In the first crop estimate of grain production for the 1982 season, the USDA indicated that all crops will be near or break previous records.

The soybean crop at 2.29 billion bushels will be up 13 percent from last year and 1 percent above the previous record set in 1979. The wheat crop at 2.77 billion bushels is 1 percent short of last year's record.

With total feed grain production at least 1 percent above the previous record it would appear that grain prices will continue to stay low. Low grain prices will encourage livestock feeding and result in higher meat supplies in 1983.

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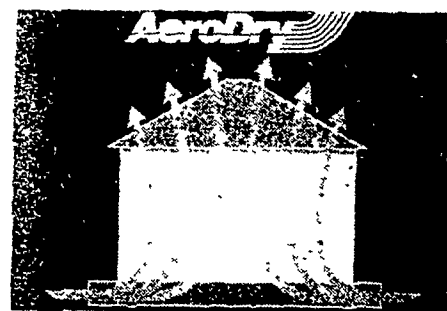
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