



Off the Sounding Board

By Sheila Miller, Editor

Battle of the bullheads

As if things weren't bad enough in the farming community, here's a situation that should make all of us stop short in our tracks and look twice to make sure our eyes aren't playing tricks on us.

I'm referring to the front page story in this week's Lancaster Farming in which writer Debbie Koontz reports on the humiliating case of farm organization against farmer against farm organization.

Although this might sound redundant, as you read Debbie's story, you will find this strangest of agricultural stories has three main characters. The powerful antagonist, in this case the farm organization known as the National Farmers Organization. The naive, unaware victim, which is played so well by unsuspecting farmers in Bedford County who were shocked and dismayed to find themselves being confronted by NFO's attorneys. And then there's the hapless white knight, the Don Quixote of this drama, played by Pennsylvania Farmers' Association.

As the plot unfolds, we find the two farm organizations in a raging war, with both farm representatives firing letters out of typewriters as fast as they can, defending their flanks from each others onslaughts and covering their trails. Both trying to be the victor, regardless of how many farmers lie crushed and trampled in the aftermath.

Like Don Quixote, perhaps PFA was too quick to see dragons in NFO's actions. It turns out that the fine-printed contracts signed by farmers who joined NFO provided a rather unreasonable but effective screen for the organization. And now NFO has sent letters to Pennsylvania farmers demanding payment of unpaid dues, even though they weren't active in Bedford County since the 1970s. So the dragons PFA chased were legitimate windmills. NFO had cleverly intertwined words to make their contracts binding, even though the unfortunate farmers thought their contracts had become extinct with age.

But, what's most disturbing about this entire court battle is the ridiculousness of what is happening within the farming community. One organization that claims it has the best interests of farmers in mind, and ad-

vocates programs for controlling markets so that farmers aren't exploited by business, now in its turn is exploiting the farmers it says it represents.

What farmer has his attorney review every application for membership into a farm organization that's filled out, most times out in the barn? Unfortunately, it seems that when dealing with NFO, it probably is a good idea.

It's quite understandable how this misunderstanding occurred, but why should it? NFO says this sort of "accounts receivable" status for membership dues is not unusual. Shouldn't that point out there is a problem in communications between their organization and farmer members? Or, is this a convenient communications gap that is ignored — renewal reminders in the form of attorneys' letters aren't mailed out until it's profitable to cash in on delinquent farmers at a time when the farm economy is at rock bottom.

And although it is commendable for PFA to look out for the interests of its members, even when it concerns another farm organization, how does it look to have farm group fighting farm group? There are enough adversaries outside of the farm community to fight, groups that threaten agriculture's existence. This infighting doesn't make sense.

Could it be a battle for sovereignty? Who's king of Ag Hill?

No, that would be too childish.

So, while the battle continues to wage, and the anger among the affected farmers smolders and begins to glow red-hot, the farm community needs to keep watch over this festering problem.

Farmers have always prided themselves on honesty — except for an occasional horse trade or two. But now it seems double-talk and double-dealing has infiltrated the farm ranks. As a result farmers and farm organizations' credibilities continue to slide into the mire, falling prey to legal entanglements and confusion. It is certainly a shame for two farm organizations who could do so much good for their membership to clash and tear each other apart, while numbed victims look on and await the outcome.

OUR READERS WRITE

Real-life drama

This is a true story, about an incident which happened to me in 1979. Fortunately all I sustained was a blackened eye, broken eye glasses and a cold from wading through ice water.

December 18 was a cold snowy day in Lackawanna County. Having no skirting around our house trailer, we decided to haul about 100 bales of "old hay" from a storage barn on the next road to block the open underside.

Upon completing the wagon loading, the tractor refused to start. Ralph and I got a neighbor to

run us home, and Ralph went back with a truck to bring the hay wagon. We decided to tow the tractor home the next morning.

December 19, I got my infant daughter to sleep and I wrapped up good for the towing job awaiting us. Ralph and I took the "pay loader," a large highway type machine, and logging chain back to the disabled tractor. I'm an experienced field operator, and have driven a tractor and "towed" someone else, but never handled the "towed" end of such a deal.

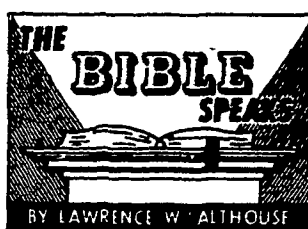
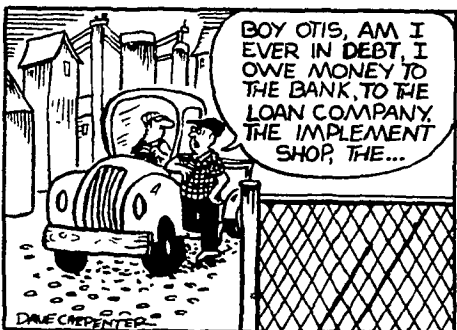
Ralph got the chain secured, and

told me, "just steer and relax." The tractor was a big old Minneapolis Moline - and very solid. Everything was going great, and we were in sight of our trailer, right near our neighbors stone wall - when I realized the tractor was going too fast.

I tried to hit the brakes but they weren't catching. I stood on both clutch and brakes - and tried to nose the tractor to bump the back of the "payloader." I started screaming at Ralph but the engine

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OTIS



WHEN SPIRITS ARE BROKEN
October 3, 1982

Background Scripture: Exodus 3:1 through 6:13.

Devotional Reading: Exodus 1:1-14.

The headline in yesterday's newspaper were shocking: five people in a neighboring city were found murdered in their adjoining homes!

This morning's edition added to the story, reporting that a man in his late twenties had been arrested by the police for the crime. But, it was the story in an adjoining column that moved me even more deeply: the parents of the accused acknowledging that their son is mentally ill, that he needs help; but, despite all their efforts, they had not been able to secure any help for him. How terrible, cried the father, that it took a horrible crime to get the attention of the authorities!

Broken Spirit, Cruel Bondage

I couldn't help putting myself in their place. How often they must have prayed to God to ask for help for their troubled son! How many times they must have wept and asked God to save their boy from the darkness within him! According to the family, their son had first gone astray when, in high school, he had gotten into drugs. How often they must have prayed for Christ to heal him of his addiction! If, this evening, they are wondering about the value of their prayers for their son, if they are questioning the goodness and love

of God, can any of us blame them?

Of course, it seems wonderful to be able to say that we never have any doubts like that, that we never raise such questions. But, when our spirits are broken and we surter cruel bondage, is it not most human for us to rebel within the depths of our own souls?

One of the reasons I love the Bible is that it is not afraid to tell us about the outspoken doubts and complaints of its most revered figures. For example, consider Moses' complaint to the Lord "O Lord, why has thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people." The sharpness and audacity of his words cause us to wince: is this not blasphemy? Is it not a sin against God?

But The Lord Said...

The answer to those questions seem to appear in the manner in which God responds to these audacious words: "But the Lord said to Moses, 'Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh...'" Please note that there is no outrage in God's words, no recriminations against Moses' complaints. Instead of reacting in anger or offense, God simply tries to help Moses to continue to trust in his love and care.

I am convinced that the real blasphemy against God is to maintain a never-faltering faith in him without ever questioning or challenging him. To do so, it seems to me, is to deny his existence, to act as if our God and his promises to us are not important enough for us to take seriously. When spirits are broken, I'm sure God expects and intends for us to complain and question. For it is in communicating these feelings to him, that we open the channels through which must flow the compassion and tender love to heal us of our brokenness and bondage.

NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin

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TO PREPARE FOR WHEAT PLANTING

Wheat is an important crop in our farming program with over 30,000 acres raised in the county last year. The Hessian Fly is always a consideration on planting dates. If you are planning to seed Abe or Auburn you don't need to be concerned with the "Fly Free" date since they are both resistant varieties. You can seed Abe and Auburn around the first of October. Redroad, Hart and Tyler on the other hand are susceptible to the new race of Hessian Fly, so that means they should not be planted until after the first killing frost or after the Fly-Free date of Oct. 10.

The fly larvae causes injury by damaging the stem tissue. This weakens the stem and the grain will lodge. The Hessian Fly is one of the most destructive insect pests on wheat in our state.

Just a couple reminders on planting wheat — it should not be planted in the same field more often than once every 5 years. Plow the field as early as possible and disc and harrow to kill as many weeds as possible. It's also a good idea to harrow the field the day of seeding.

TO WATCH FOR UNWANTED GUESTS

Now that the weather is getting cooler you may find some unwanted guests in your barn and home. You won't see them too often perhaps, but they're there. These guests will destroy more

food and property than they eat. The guests in question are rats and mice.

It's estimated that a hundred million rats cost Americans a billion dollars a year. That is ten dollars a rat.

Rats thrive in areas where grains lie on the ground, where trash and garbage cans lie around, and where trash piles exist. Rats not only spoil foods; they kill small animals and chickens. They also carry diseases to men and animals.

Cold weather causes rats to migrate indoors. I would suggest that you destroy rat foods and feeding places. To keep pests out, rat-proofing buildings may be necessary. Bait stations can also be constructed. They should be made so that pets and children cannot come in contact with the bait.

TO PROTECT PLANTS FOR THE WINTER

Plants with shallow roots such as azaleas, rhododendrons, mountain laurel and flowering dogwood need frequent waterings. And it's a good idea to continue watering these plants on a regular basis until the ground freezes this fall.

A shallow-rooted plant has most of its root system in the upper three to five inches of soil. Since this is the first layer of soil to dry out, it's very important that these plants receive at least an inch of

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