



Off the Sounding Board

By Sheila Miller, Editor

Agriculture runs the country

"It's certainly a lot easier than shoveling," I thought as I watched the golden yellow ears of corn sliding out of the gravity wagon and onto an elevator. Memories of years past when backaches and blisters were the rewards of a bumper corn crop were gratefully exchanged for this year's more modern harvest techniques.

As the cobs tumbled and rolled over each other in their rush to be first into the waiting bin that was hurriedly makeshifted to hold our future cattle feed, it was encouraging to watch as the heap of corn grew higher and wider with each rattle of the elevator chain. But, with each load that lumbered in from field to waiting crib, the reality of what this record crop of corn will mean to farmers across the nation was only too apparent.

The latest USDA statistics show corn at a record high of 8.33 billion bushels — two percent above last year's harvest. The nation's 72.82 million acres of corn are estimated to yield an average 114.4 bushels per acre.

Here in Pennsylvania, which historically has been a corn deficit state, the story is not such a bountiful one, however. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture figures forecast corn for grain at 126.04 million bushels which is six percent below last year's harvest record. An average yield of 92 bushels per acre has been predicted on the state's 1.37 million acres.

But, despite Pennsylvania's cutback in corn production, the overall story is one of too much corn two years in a row with consequent drastic price reductions — not good news for farmers who count on converting their corn into cash directly and not through cattle or other livestock.

Late October Midwest corn prices fell to \$1.86 a bushel, down from last year's \$2.33 price and a far cry from 1980's \$3.25 corn. It doesn't take much pencil pushing to realize farmers aren't going to get rich at today's market prices — in fact, we'll be lucky to break even.

The financial impact of this year's bin-busting harvest will be far-reaching. It may trigger overproduction in the already overflowing dairy industry. Cheap corn prices may find farmers jumping into the hog fattening business which will surely result in the finally profitable pork prices taking a dramatic plunge when these animals reach market weight.

Farmers who are looking to export deals to cure their ills will likely be suffering from maize migraines for quite some time, finding them as hard to capture as the elusive butterfly. USDA's most recent figures show corn exports down 16 percent in volume and down 34 percent in value.

As if our record crop wasn't bad enough, the slump in export trade over the past year or so has created a corn carryover crisis. Economists report stocks of corn spilling over from previous harvests in amounts reaching 2.37 billion bushels as of Oct. 1, 1982 — that's up 129 percent from the 1.03 billion bushels held last year at the same time. The result — no room in the bin for this year's corn harvest. Statistics show 61 percent of the carryover stock is still on the farm, up 193 percent from last October.

Looking ahead, some economists predict things are bound to get worse before they get better for corn growers. A carryover of nearly 3 billion bushels has been predicted for October 1983 — a figure far above previous records.

As US-USSR grain talks wait to be translated into substantial contracts by diplomats who hedge US farmers' futures, some farmers and legislators are trying to take concrete approaches to softening the corn surplus blow.

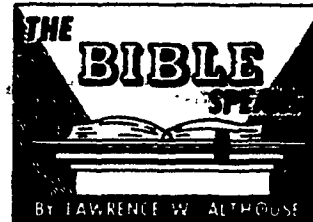
Jack Parsons, president of the National Corn Growers Association and a corn farmer from Wapello, Iowa, encourages fellow farmers to sign up in the 1983 production control program because of the "bleak outlook for corn prices in the 1983/84 season." Critical of USDA's 1982 acreage diversion program, Parsons is throwing his weight behind next year's 10 percent paid diversion and 10 percent acreage reduction plan which he said will provide more incentive for farmers to sign up in '83.

Parsons blamed the 1980 grain embargo for about 500 million bushels of lost corn exports to the USSR each year since the ineffective trade blockade was attempted by the Carter administration.

Earlier this fall, Iowa Congressman Berkley Bedell introduced legislation designed to help out distressed corn farmers. His bill, which was signed into law by President Reagan on Oct. 21, provides for surplus "agricultural commodities" to be converted into alcohol fuels. The Secretary of Agriculture now has the authority to make CCC stocks available for processing by alcohol fuel producers.

"This legislation allows us to strengthen our agricultural economy by removing surplus stocks as dampers on market prices while at the same time producing a usable fuel that saves the taxpayers' dollars for storage, transportation and related costs that would otherwise be spent on the surplus commodities," commented Bedell.

Well, we always knew agriculture is what keeps this country running. Now, if only we could make our prices jump the way the gasoline prices escalated over the past few years.



ON FINDING THE CHAMPION
November 21, 1982

Background Scripture:
Judges 6:1 through 8:21.
Devotional Reading:
Psalms 105:7-15.

The story of Gideon is one of the most popular ones in the Old Testament. Even if we're a bit hazy of the details of the story, we know it is about one of God's great champions.

But, despite its great popularity, the story is often not as deeply understood as it should be. We are likely to become so engrossed in the rise of this particular champion of God that we miss the real significance of his story.

Let me spell it out: much more than a story about a great champion of God who lived thousands of years ago, this is a story about champions of God who are present — if unrecognized — today.

If The Lord Is With Us...
In a time when the Israelites have suffered greatly at the hands of the Midianites — a situation they have brought on themselves — they begin to grumble that God has failed to send them a champion as he has in the past. In other words, God is responsible for their plight, as they see it.

Thus when a messenger ("angel") of the Lord comes to chat with Gideon and says to him, "The Lord is with you, you mightily

man of valor," Gideon is having none of it. "Pray, sir," he replies cynically, "if the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where are all his wonderful deeds which our father recounted to us...?" (6:13).

I think that neither God nor his messenger blinked at the straightforward and blunt reply from Gideon. In fact, it might have been that honesty that attracted God to this man (who wouldn't have won any polls for "Most Likely to Succeed"). Gideon simply said openly what lots of other people were thinking. He was honestly puzzled by God's apparent failure to live up to his reputation. I think God has a special affection for those of his children who have the honesty to challenge his messengers with "If God is with us, then how come...?"

Do Not I Send You?
Actually, when we face God and his messengers with that kind of question, it gives him an opportunity to challenge us in turn. Gideon wanted to know where God's champion was and God countered by asking: "Do not I send you?"

Of course, Gideon resisted this as best he could: "Pray, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family?" When faced with God's challenge we can always think of lots of reasons to refuse. And the assurance God gives Gideon is also the assurance he gives us: "But I will be with you..." It is God who makes us sufficient for our role as his champion.

The next time you find yourself saying or thinking, "Why doesn't someone do something about that?" take a good look for God's champion in your own mirror. He's there, if you really want to find him.

NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin

Lancaster County Agriculture Agent
Phone 717-394-6851



To Beware of Wild Birds

No doubt most livestock producers have faced the problem of wild birds during snow covered days. These birds come by the thousands and feed from the livestock bunks and feeders. They not only eat feed but their droppings present very unsanitary conditions for everyone. Also, since these birds fly from farm to farm, they are a definite source of spreading various diseases. Unfortunately, we do not have a real good cure for the problem. They can be screened out of confinement buildings. There is however, a pelleted feed available at some feed dealers that is effective on starlings. Some farmers suggest using a shallow pan with about a half inch of salt on the bottom with a thin layer of lard over the salt so as the bird pecks through the lard they pick up the salt. Also, some builders have a hanging bird perch with a built-in wick that contains bird repellent. Good luck.

To Order Small Fruit Plants Early

This may strike you as premature, but this is a good time to order small fruit plants for next spring. Although you won't put them in the ground until April, you should be flipping through catalogs now. Ordering early assures you a wide selection of the best varieties. Companies begin filling orders with their best stock...if you delay you could be stuck with what's left over. Ordering early also means you'll get your strawberries or blueberries or whatever at the best time to plant.

So, dig out those catalogs

now...get your order in...and be prepared for delicious fruit from your planting.

To Recognize the Consequences of a Bumper Corn Crop

The price of corn is so low this year many farmers have decided to not sell. They plan to store as much as possible and wait until prices improve. It could be a long wait. Corn prices have fallen steadily for the past 3 years. In 1980 corn sold for \$3.25 a bushel...today it's down to \$1.86 a bushel...well below the cost of production.

Corn prices are so low because production has been so high. Two bumper harvests, back-to-back, have created the surplus problem. Farmers grew as much as they could because they thought the export market would not be satisfied. But the export market hasn't responded as expected. In fact, exports are down 15% from last year.

The domestic market won't provide much relief either. Meat producers continue to feed less livestock. This may change though, if producers take advantage of the low feed prices and expand herds. But this could put them in the same situation that the grain industry is suffering from now.

Today, corn farmers aren't even thinking about profits...they just hope to break even.

To Repair Machinery During the Winter

Most of the outside field work is

(Turn to Page A12)

OTIS

