

PUC rules

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said he was surprised that the PUC "ruled for the farmers after the law judge ruled against us twice."

Mills, who has been in the dairy business for eight years and milks 30 head of Holsteins in a stall barn, said stray voltage almost "wiped me out." He first noticed the unwelcomed current on his farm in 1977 after a new milk pipeline was installed. "But I was too ignorant to know what it was," he admitted.

He said he began to notice his cows would not drink water out of their bowls. Then the number of mastitis cases began to increase and the temperament of his cows worsened with each milking.

Finally in October 1980, Penn State's Steve Spencer positively diagnosed stray voltage flowing through Mills' barn. Meter readings, recalled Mills, measured roughly 4 volts in the stanchions and 7 volts from the floor drain to bulk tank in the milkhouse. (Stray voltage should not exceed 0.5 V, otherwise humans and animals can feel discomfort.)

That same month Mills contacted West Penn Power about his stray voltage problem. "They tried to tell us that it was our problem and that they were not going to do anything," he recalled.

After the problem failed to disappear, the utility company agreed to separate the neutral ground on their electric line feeding the farm in order to determine if the stray voltage was originating on or off the farm. This was done in February 1981 and immediately stray voltage on the Mills farm was brought down to tolerable levels.

Nine months later, West Penn electricians returned to the Mills farm with orders to reconnect the neutral grounds — having them disconnected was in violation of the safety codes. And so Larry Mills found himself once again confronting the phantom phenomenon — stray voltage. That's when he contacted Louis

Glantz for legal help.

He also decided to eliminate the intolerable stray voltage by purchasing an isolation transformer for \$700 to separate his farm from the commercial lines. He paid an additional \$600 to have the transformer installed and his barn rewired in January 1982. Since then, Mills noted, his cows' milk production has "increased substantially."

Co-complainants Joel and Larson Wenger who operate a father-son dairy farm, Weng-Lea Farms, in Greencastle, Westmoreland County began to notice stray voltage symptoms in their herd of 120 Holsteins about the same time as Mills did. Joel Wenger, a veteran dairyman with 25 years experience, explained how he noticed a change in his cows' dispositions and production soon after he installed a new milking parlor in 1978.

In April 1980, Penn State's Steve Spencer found stray voltage lurking in the Wenger setup after taking readings of 2.5 volts from bulk tank to drain and in other areas of the barn.

Wenger recounted how he contacted West Penn Power, and praised the positive efforts made by the local engineer to help. But, said Wenger, when the local engineer could do no more without getting help from the "higher ups," West Penn's decision-makers said "no."

In Wengers' case, the power company eventually disconnected the neutral grounds on their line to determine where the stray voltage was coming from; and like Mills, the Wenger's problems stemmed from off-farm sources. The dairy farmers respite from the traumas of stray voltage ended after a year when safety necessitated the hook-up of the neutrals again.

As the Wengers watched their herd's production drop by 10 to 15 percent, they decided it was time to invest \$1,500 in an isolation transformer. Since this past

January when the transformer was installed, Wenger said he's seeing a slow rise in cow production.

"I'm having better luck in production now; my cows are milking out better. But cows don't forget bad experiences right away. It's like electric fences — once a cow knows one's been there and gets shocked, you almost have to chase her through even after you've taken the fence down," said Wenger.

Although Wenger had not been notified officially by PUC on the Nov. 19 decision when he talked with Lancaster Farming on Tuesday, he said if PUC had ruled in favor of the farmers "it's time they admitted the problem."

When asked if he felt the fight was worth all the time and money, Wenger commented, "We didn't do it just to benefit ourselves. There are other farmers out there who are having the same problem we did."

Oops

In last week's Dec. 4 issue, the million dollar-selling cow, Allendairy Glamorous Ivy, selling from the Greenleaf, Wis. farm of Tom Pearson, was described as being bred at the farm of Ed Doebereiner. It should have read, "the Allendairy farm, formerly of Mechanicsburg." It was born and raised at the Doebereiner farm.

Mushroom growers

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against the quota on Sept. 30 were influenced by their feelings on liberal free trade.

"They didn't want America to be accused of being trade restrictive," scoffed Kooker. "There's a difference between free and fair trade, you know."

Why did China target the U.S. mushroom industry for its export trade which doubled from 1980-81 through marketing strategies keyed to undercutting domestic mushrooms and other imports in price? According to Kooker, their reasons included the foreign exchange factor, and the fact that the mushroom industry was already a viable, established business in the U.S. Along with that, Kooker noted the mushroom business is highly labor intensive, and the Chinese have cheap labor.

The end result of the increasing amounts of canned mushrooms flooding into U.S. markets since 1979 is the thinning out of U.S. mushroom growers to the tune of 25 percent. And, when more mushroom growers quit, which Kooker predicts will be a common occurrence during the next 18

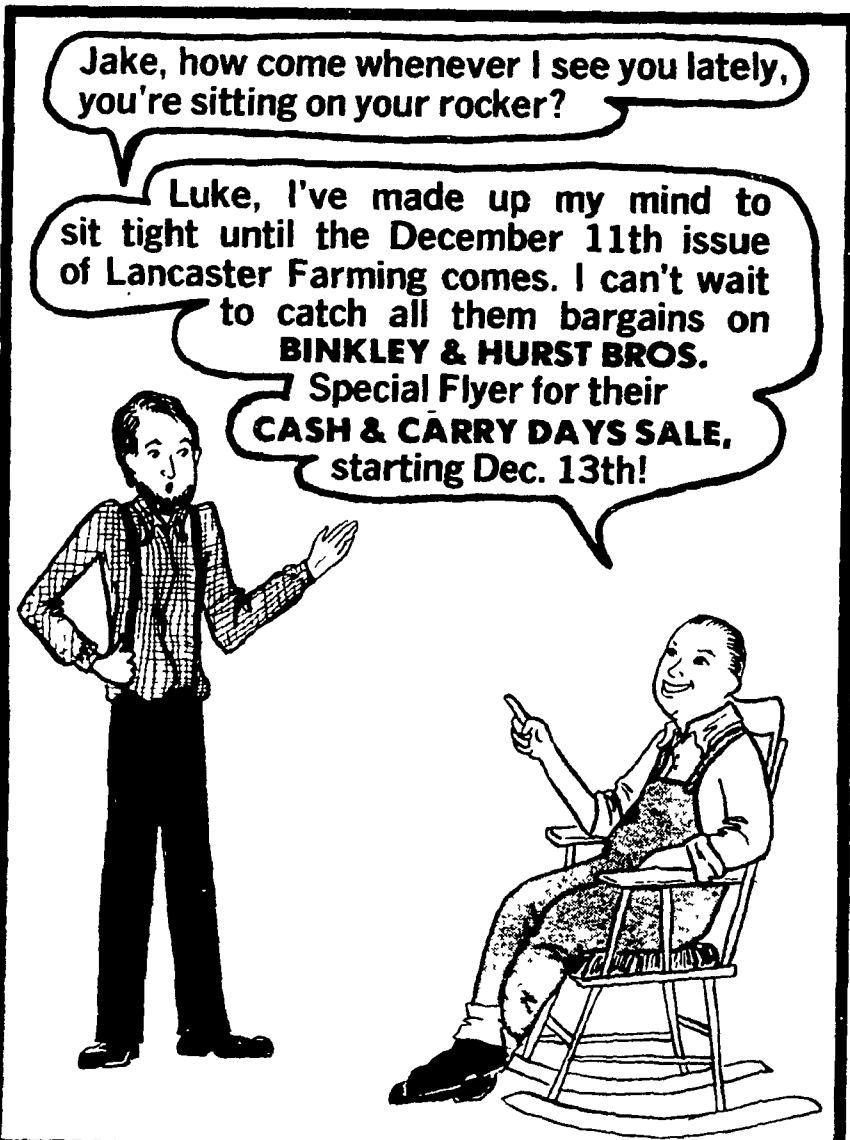
months, the loss will be felt by many other businesses.

Kooker, who admits he is disappointed but vows he will not be discouraged by the mushroom industry's defeat, insists he will "keep fighting" and will continue to pursue every avenue for import relief. The next step for mushroom growers, he said, is to unite in support of a fresh market promotion program.

"That's going to be hard for growers to do, though, because it will take voluntary contributions. The \$15,000 we spent trying to get import relief during the past five months has drained the well dry — AMI has no more money left to continue the battle."

Kooker described the nation's mushroom growers as being "down on their knees" and "kicked in the teeth." He recounted his early morning meeting with three growers Thursday during which grown men cried when they realized their last straw for survival had finally broken.

"Perhaps the best way to get a guy up and fighting is to kick him when he's down," Kooker said angrily.



Jake, how come whenever I see you lately, you're sitting on your rocker?

Luke, I've made up my mind to sit tight until the December 11th issue of Lancaster Farming comes. I can't wait to catch all them bargains on BINKLEY & HURST BROS. Special Flyer for their CASH & CARRY DAYS SALE, starting Dec. 13th!

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