

Farm situation worst since Depression

HERSHEY — Like Herbert Hoover 50 years before them, Reagan Administration leaders think they see recovery "just around the corner, but I will become a believer only as soon as I see some positive signs of an upturn in the basic industries, including agriculture," George W. Stone, president of National Farmers' Union, said this week.

Speaking at the annual convention of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Union held at the Hershey Hotel, Stone told the 200 delegates, "I hope this time the optimists are right, but last year, month-by-month, everything got worse."

"The purchasing power of farmers dropped successively every month of 1982. Unemployment went up every month of 1982," he reported, noting that the U. S. parity ratio, which measures farm purchasing power, in December sagged below the worst level in the Great Depression.

During December, the Farmers Union official revealed, 28 percent of the workers in the metal trades were unemployed, 24 percent in the auto industry, 22 percent in construction, 20 percent in wood products, and 18 percent in mining, all significant in Pennsylvania.

Stone observed that housing starts in 1982 were at the lowest level in more than 35 years, and automobile sales very low.

"In this situation, the farmer who is foreclosed or who liquidates just a step ahead of bankruptcy has no place to go, and the wage earner who gets a pink slip when a steel plant or other commercial venture closes has no place to turn," he commented.

Stone contended that the ef-

fective market demand for products of American farms is severely damaged by the persistent high rate of unemployment.

"Per-capita consumption of red meats has declined by 20 percent in 1981 and 1982, and per-capita consumption of dairy products has been slipping over the past ten years," he explained. "If we had a condition of full employment, instead of 12 million unemployed, there would probably be shortages instead of surpluses of meat and dairy products."

The Farmers Union head reported that a final court decision on the 50-cent milk penalty tax is still being awaited.

"However it turns out, amendments in the dairy law will be needed and I want to commend Pennsylvania Farmers Union and the milk cooperatives for their efforts towards this end," he said.

In discussing the Reagan Administration's payment-in-kind program, Stone commented that the Farmers' Union does not believe an entire farm should be allowed to be taken out of grain production. "We believe in the grain reserve program set up by the federal government. However, we agree that a secure payment schedule to grain farmers is better than planting a crop and adding to the grain surplus."

Stone's comments were echoed by PFU president James Brown, who added that PIK would not have as much impact on Pennsylvania farmers as it will have for grain farmers in the Midwest.

Vice president of PFU, Barbara Woods, noted that dairy farmers in Pennsylvania who grow grain for feed are still having to grow corn,

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On hand at this week's Pennsylvania Farmers' Union annual meeting held in Hershey were the organization's leaders, both on the state and national level. NFU president George Stone, center, discusses key farm issues with PFU president James Brown, left, and PFU vice president Barbara Woods.

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