

Mandata poultry

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"I've been in the poultry business for 20 years and count on this income.

"But think of the younger guys with newer houses, they're really up against it.

"It was around Christmas a year ago that their late payments went to 16 weeks. With two flocks in arrears, they owe me about \$10,000.

"Depending on the size of their flocks, some growers may be owed three times that amount.

"When the financial situation became worse, we organized and 25 or so of us hired a lawyer.

"We hear all kinds of rumors that Mandata intends to liquidate, but keep its cut-up line and process only whole dressed birds that are brought in.

"We hear that the hatchery will be picking up the remaining birds that are grown out.

"But the growers with small birds may only have about a week's worth of feed on hand and then what."

In a letter to State Sec. of Agriculture Penrose Hallowell, the State Grange urged the Department "to aggressively seek new and expanded markets for the poultrymen."

The Grange also asked that the department call a meeting of the growers, farm organizations, the USDA and the State Department of Commerce to develop long-range strategies to benefit the Pennsylvania poultry farmer, and to increase the Department's efforts to advise the grower on ways to protect his financial interests.

Poultry growers in Adams, Mifflin, Snyder, Juniata, York and Lancaster counties have been under loosely-written grower-operator contracts for several years with Mandata, according to the Grange.

Under the contracts, Mandata owns the birds and supplies the feed and growers provide housing and labor. The contracts stipulate

no payment period and either party may cancel at any time.

Earl Parsons, president of the Growers Association, said the company has promised to notify all growers within a week or two by letter as to the arrangements for back payments, according to the Grange.

The State Grange has been attempting to help the growers since January when they requested help in getting back pay from Mandata. Growers have also asked for state legislation to provide protection in cases of default or bankruptcy.

In February, the Grange set up a meeting between Mandata growers, the State Department of Agriculture and government officials in Harrisburg. Last week, the Grange formed a poultry advisory committee to draft state legislation requiring all poultry processors and brokers to be bonded. The State Grange plans to have the legislation introduced shortly.

On the national scene, the Grange seeks to amend the Federal Packers and Stockyards Act, which insures payment to livestock producers if a packer goes bankrupt, to provide identical financial security for the poultry industry.

State Grange Master Charles Wismer said:

"This problem is not unique to Pennsylvania. Currently, there are similar cases pending in Arkansas and North Carolina involving \$10 million. The situation here in Pennsylvania makes it even more critical to develop legislation to protect our state's poultry industry."

Many growers are deeply in debt for loans on broiler houses, which can cost an average of \$125,000 each, Wismer said. In addition, they have expenses for utilities to heat the houses.

Rodeo at the Buck next Saturday



Professional championship rodeo will be held at Buck Tractor Pull Stadium at 2 and 7 p.m. next Saturday. The stadium is located about 10 miles south of Lancaster on Rt. 272.

Championship events include bareback bronc riding, steer wrestling, saddle bronc riding, Brahma bull riding, calf roping, cowgirl's barrel race and team steer roping. Up to 200 participants are expected.

A total of \$5,000 in prize money and entry fees will be offered, as well as points toward the year-end world championships. Additional featured attractions include two of the youngest trick and fancy stunt riders in the world, a trick and fancy rope artist, the bucking bull of the year and the rodeo clowns.

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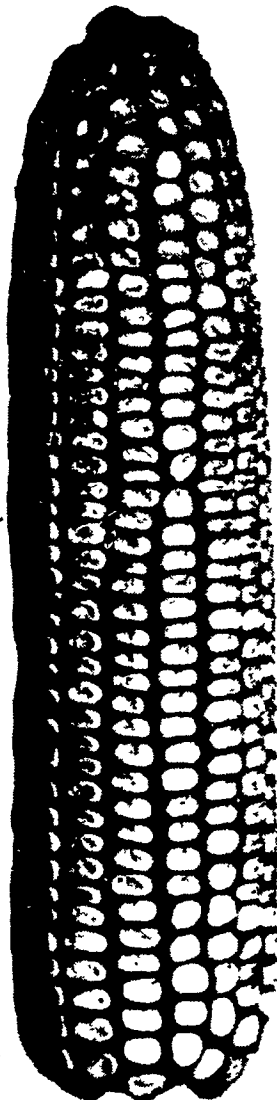
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