

Plenty of room in NE for livestock, but

HARRISBURG — They call it the populus Northeast - a block of 13 states starting with Virginia and West Virginia, and extending northward to Maine. Within this region resides one-third of the nation's people.

Also inhabiting this region are over 10 million head of beef and dairy cattle, pigs, sheep, and horses. They are part of an agricultural livestock enterprise that does a \$5 billion a year business and has an overall \$35 billion impact on the region's economy.

There are enough farm animals to put a double line head to tail on all the interstate highways in the northeastern states.

Lancaster County has the most farm animals per square mile in the nation.

Despite these numbers, the northeast imports most of its red meat. In Pennsylvania, approximately 80 percent of beef is imported, while only 20 percent is grown here. A decline in the amount of farmland and increasing transportation costs are causing agricultural leaders to examine the situation.

Presently, over 1.8 million acres in Pennsylvania are being used for livestock pasture but almost as much more acreage is available. Officials of the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS) note that this additional acreage is either

underused or idle and can be converted to forage production for livestock. With ample water, from 35 to 50 inches annual rainfall, the potential for production in the northeast is unexcelled.

Farmers agree that by developing processing and marketing systems in this part of the country, meat, wool, and dairy products could be grown and marketed locally, lowering transportation and energy needs.

"However, it appears that we need to take better care of some of our existing pasture before we push too much for more livestock," said James Olson, State Conservationist for Pennsylvania. "We could increase livestock numbers by 50 percent if the present pastures were better managed."

Soil conservationists identified some areas of concern. The 11 million acres of pasture in the northeast are now losing 34.4 million tons of soil annually. Over 2 million acres are eroding at more than 5 tons per acre each year. Soil conservationists consider this rate to be land depleting over the long run.

Another concern was that farmers are giving pastures less care now than in the past. In 1967, 604,000 acres of Pennsylvania pasture were managed properly. By 1977, this acreage had declined to 449,000 acres. "Pastures are

often the most mismanaged land on farms," said Olson.

SCS conservationists are also concerned about the disposal of animal waste. Some areas have surface and underground water pollution from livestock waste. Farmers are becoming more aware of the problem and increasing efforts to correct it.

Another possible problem in the crowded northeast is that cattle

and people do not mix well due to odors, noise, and other conflicts. Olson pointed out that there are many acres of land in the northeast that are not near any urban area even in populated states like Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania.

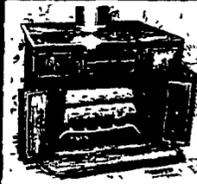
A Soil Conservation Service task

force is evaluating this situation. They report that even though present economic conditions may be somewhat limited for livestock expansion, the long-range outlook is promising. "It should be," Olson said. "The northeast has the needed resources—plenty of land, water, and people."

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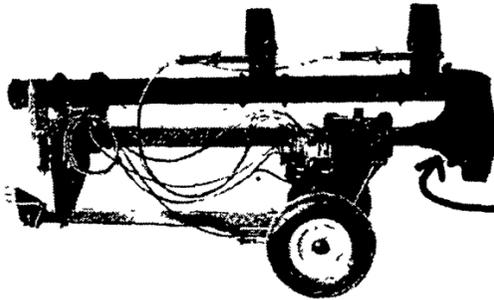
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USDA seeks retirees for Peace Corps

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block and Loret Miller Ruppe, director of the Peace Corps, today announced a program to encourage retiring USDA employees with special skills to consider service as volunteers in the Peace Corps.

Under the program, USDA will send letters to some 3,000 former employees with skills in such areas as crop production, plant protection, animal husbandry, range management, the development, the cooperatives, the application of appropriate technology, soil and water conservation, forestry and agricultural education.

In the future, USDA employees will be contacted as their retirement approaches, Block said.

The Peace Corps now has more than 5,200 volunteers serving in over 60 countries, Ruppe said, with about 3,000 replacements needed each year. Retired USDA volunteers with specialized agricultural skills could help meet this need, especially for the critical skills related to food production, he said.

USDA already is involved in international agricultural development and assistance through its Office of International Cooperation and Development. The new cooperative agreement between USDA and the Peace Corps will help both organizations better carry out their international responsibilities, Block said.

The Peace Corps pays travel, medical and living expenses of

volunteers during their service. Volunteers also receive stipends of \$175 per month which are available when their service is completed.

Technical training, instruction in the language of the country to which they are assigned and an introduction to the culture and life of that country are all provided to volunteers before departure.

Volunteers generally

serve for a 2-year period, but they can extend their service for another year or longer. Arrangements can be made for a husband and wife to serve together, Ruppe said.

More information on volunteer opportunities is available from the nearest Peace Corps office, or by calling, toll free, (800) 424-8580, extension 93, or by writing to the Peace Corps, Washington, D.C. 20523.

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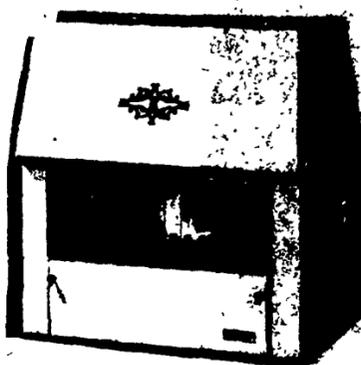
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