

Ag doesn't control its own destiny

NEWARK, Del. — Agriculture today faces complex problems which call for creative new solutions. For most farm people these solutions are likely to be unfamiliar and not very comfortable, Missouri economist Harold F. Breimyer told a gathering of Delaware agricultural industry representatives September 28 at the University of Delaware. The issues to be dealt with during the present decade, he said, cover everything from domestic and foreign economic policies to farmland preservation and the framing of a new farm law.

Breimyer, professor of agricultural economics and extension economist at the University of Missouri, was keynote speaker at a colloquium sponsored by the College of Agricultural Sciences on the theme, "Delaware Agriculture in the Eighties," held in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the chartering of the University of Delaware. Some 120 people attended the event, including state agricultural industry leaders and farmers, agribusiness executives, government officials, representatives of the press, members of the ag college faculty and extension professionals.

The purpose of the colloquium was to discuss practical steps which the Delaware agricultural industry can take to adjust to the uncertain economic conditions of the 1980s.

According to Breimyer, the key issues facing American — and Delaware — agriculture in the 1980s are: the fading farm image; taxation; the organizational make-

up of agriculture (that is, who will own and control the land, and what will be the status of the farmer who works it); and the relationship between national and international issues and their effects on farm prices and income policies.

"Our nation's agriculture is losing its identity, its singular, exceptional quality," the economist said. He predicted that in the future farming and the rural community will be more affected by nonagricultural than agricultural policies. This is a "hard reality" which farmers and farm leaders who'd like to believe that agriculture controls its own destiny must acknowledge, he said.

The inflation of the 1970s is the number one economic factor affecting agriculture today, Breimyer said. He believes the October 1979 turnaround in the Federal Reserve Board's monetary policy has had at least as much effect on farmers' fortunes in the 1980s as export embargoes, price support laws and PIK programs. He said it was important for planners to be aware of the sensitivity of today's commercial agriculture to economic policies that carry no "agriculture only" tag.

Speaking of what he called "farming's fading image," he said agriculture in Delaware and elsewhere is blending more and more into the scene, to the point where "You can't hardly tell a farmer no more."

Closer integration of farming with the community has its pluses and minuses," Breimyer said. "Perhaps the most vexatious relationship now and in the future

lies in what is broadly called environmental concerns. I have in mind land use, water management, soil conservation and similar matters. These are not new in Delaware.

"In Missouri we have more open space and are postponing for perhaps another decade various of the public issues that even now cannot be dodged in your more developed state," he said. But even Missourians are starting to hear such new language as air pollution surrounding hog barns. "Goodness, when I was growing up, not only a barn but a farmer himself was expected to have a distinctive aroma. But now some sensitive people are purifying the air with lawsuits.

"The economics of agriculture in

my state is now partly the economics of selection of landfills and even more the designating of places for disposal of hazardous wastes," Breimyer said.

Taxation as it relates to farmland preservation is another issue confronting the agricultural community, he said. "There seems almost to be a conspiracy of silence about the relationship between taxes paid and services provided, and about how tax policy affects land use.

"I wish I had a clear idea of how the related issues of environmental

rules, taxation policy and land use will eventually be resolved. My preference is that they be resolved jointly. New York and Pennsylvania are trying a district approach that appeals to many of us in the Midwest.

"The scheme of buying development rights or easements could be employed not only to stop loss of farmland to nonfarm uses but also to promote conserving use of erodible land," he added.

Breimyer predicted that more attention would be given nationally to conserving farmland than to preventing its loss to other uses. "Beyond doubt, during the export

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