

# Lancaster Co. weathers a difficult '83 gracefully

BY JACK HUBLEY

LANCASTER — Though avian influenza and a severe drought were two of the biggest newsmakers in 1983, their combined effects weren't sufficient to unseat Lancaster County as the number-one nonirrigated agricultural county in the nation, according to Lancaster County extension director Jay Irwin who released the county's 1983 production figures.

Among the state's 67 counties, Lancaster led the way in dairy, pork, beef, broiler, egg and all other poultry production.

And of all livestock and poultry production, dairy products ranked at the top with a total value of \$213.8 million.

One inconsistency in the statistics was an increase of 1300 dairy cows over 1982, despite a troublesome surplus of dairy products. Ironically, the government's 50 cent per hundredweight assessment on milk actually contributed to an increase in both cow numbers and production, Irwin said, by causing farmers to increase herd size in an effort to offset lost profits. Lancaster County ended the year with 112,300 cows.

Though Lancaster County was located in the eye of an avian flu storm that was responsible for the deaths of over 16 million Pennsylvania birds, the county maintained its lead in poultry production, accounting for 42.2 percent of the state's layers and 42.8 percent of its broilers.

The value of the county's poultry products came to \$174.5 million, exceeding 1982 figures by \$16.5 million. A decrease in layer numbers from 7.9 to 7.6 million was more than offset by an increase in

broilers from 41 to nearly 44 million birds. The value of all other poultry products, (comprised largely of turkeys) more than doubled, from \$11.7 million in 1982 to \$25.7 in 1983.

With heavy avian flu losses not incurred until November of last year, Irwin expects that 1984 statistics will more accurately reflect the epidemic's impact.

Though the county maintained its top statewide beef producer rating, total numbers of cattle and calves decreased by 2,100 animals to 270,400, for a total value of \$159.5 million compared to \$175.7 million in 1982.

With hog numbers going from 285,000 in 1982, to 340,000 the following year, county swine producers discovered that they picked the wrong year to increase production. Despite the increase in numbers of animals, the total value of the county's pork products declined from \$21.9 million to \$21.2 million.

Lancaster County's sheep production increased by 500 animals over a 1982 total of 5,700.

The total value of county livestock and poultry products was about \$570 million, representing an increase of \$1.7 million over 1982. Lancaster County's sheep production increased by 500 animals over a 1982 total of 5,700.

Turning to crop production, Irwin pointed out that corn was still king, covering two-thirds of the county's tillable acres. Last year's devastating dry weather was reflected in an average yield of only 63 bushels per acre, compared to 120 bushels a year earlier.

Irwin noted that last year's scarcity of feed grain was compounded by the fact that more acreage was required to fill silos. Though only one-third of 1982's

193,000 acres of corn was needed for the silo, that figure rose to 40 percent last year when silage yields dropped to 13.5 tons per acre from a 1982 figure of 20 tons per acre.

Irwin added that this year's robust corn crop should more than adequately meet feed grain requirements.

In sharp contrast to corn, wheat yields increased from 40 to 45 bushels per acre. This increased yield helped to offset a 5,400-acre decrease in the amount of wheat planted from 1982 to 1983. Since most wheat harvests were completed before the dry weather, yields were not affected by the drought.

Suffering from the lack of moisture, potato yields dropped from 26,500 pounds to 20,000 pounds per acre, but hay yields were largely unaffected, with the first cutting completed before dry weather.

Irwin said that tobacco recovered very well from the drought, yielding 1,831 pounds, or only 164 pounds per acre less than last year.

The number of acres planted in vegetables rose again this year, with crop value increasing slightly, as well. Fruit harvests were victimized by the desert-like conditions, however, with the value of last year's harvest decreasing nearly 30 percent to \$1.9 million.

The total value of Lancaster County crops was \$122 million, down \$7 million from the previous year.

All in all, said Irwin, the statistics added up to, "a very positive report," considering the hurdles faced by county farmers last year.

"I'm well pleased to see how the

poultry industry is recovering from avian flu," he concluded, adding that the true strength of the industry can be seen in the fact that two-thirds of the farmers who lost their flocks have already repopulated.

## Grange to help Mandata growers

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania State Grange has agreed to provide legal counsel to poultry growers for the bankrupt Mandata Poultry firm which is seeking to regain money they paid to growers 90 days prior to their bankruptcy.

According to John Robinson, Esq., attorney for the Grange, payments made by bankrupt companies up to 90 days before the bankruptcy petition is filed are considered "preferential transfers" and can under some circumstances be voided by the bankrupt firm and equally distributed to all creditors. There are, however, several exceptions to this rule.

About 80 growers have been notified by mandata that they must return money paid to them up to 90 days before the processor's bankruptcy on April 9, 1983. They were asked to appear at a court hearing on August 29 to voice these "preferential transfers"

The Grange has offered to represent the growers for a modest fee, much the same as they did for dairymen involved in the Scheps Cheese bankruptcy, regardless of Grange membership. Charles

Wisner, State Grange Master, said "the Grange is a fraternal organization founded on brotherhood. Traditionally Grange members have helped one another in hard times. An appeal made to Grange members to help the dairy farmers in the Scheps Cheese bankruptcy drew donations of

more than \$3,000 towards the dairy farmers legal expenses. A number of the dairymen we represent are not grange members."

Any poultry farmer who has been asked to return checks he received from Mandata can request assistance from the grange or get further information by calling its office toll free at 1-800-242-9661.

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