

## At Dutch Dozens Farms

## Claude Hess 'programs' for the future

**BY JACK HUBLEY**  
**MASTERSONVILLE** — Efficiency. You hear the word spoken in ag circles everywhere these days. In this time of belt tightening, it's a commodity that all the specialists, advisors and professors profess that we need more of.

The fortune tellers say that if we don't learn how to produce a dozen of eggs or a pound of beef or pork more efficiently we're going to be out of business.

So what is this stuff called efficiency, where can we find it and how much does it cost? Though you can't buy it by the pound, Mastersonville egg producer Claude Hess of Dutch Dozens Farms will be happy to show you how to go about manufacturing your own supply.

One the crucial ingredients, according to Hess, is computer technology.

Though Hess has been in the egg business for a quarter of a century, it wasn't until the early 1970's that he began to see a need for a less time consuming and more comprehensive method of managing his egg production records. Hess knew little about computers, but he wasn't afraid to turn to others who might be able to provide the answers he sought.

Sponsoring a grant to Columbia University in 1976, he assigned a University graduate student to the task of laying the ground work for a computerized feed formulation program.

Then in 1977, Claude turned to Kenneth Hess of Lancaster Labs, Inc., who wrote the first usable feed program.

"Back then, it took computers eight to 15 minutes to do what today's units can accomplish in as little as 20 seconds," Hess reflects. Fascinated by the computer in-

dustry's rapid growth, the poultryman looks at each technological advance in terms of how it can be harnessed to improve the lot of America's food producers.

To this end, Hess's latest venture has been the development of his Layer Performance Report, a comprehensive computer program designed specifically for the egg producer. But he wasn't about to tackle the task on his own.

Hiring a student-professor team of programmers from Messiah College, Hess set them to work creating an egg producer's program that would be both sophisticated yet easy to use. And now, three months after their work began, computer science instructor William Strausbaugh and college senior Tim Shenk think they've come up with the perfect recipe. The only ingredients to be added are the eggs themselves.

"The objective of the program is to help egg producers manage their flocks more efficiently through more detailed record keeping," says Tim Shenk.

The program is composed of eight menu options beginning with initial data on both the birds themselves and the facility. Information entered here includes the number and age of the hens, initial flock value, interest rate, depreciation rate and other necessary data. All pertinent financial information on housing is included here as well.

The second category of the eight options is labeled Layer Performance Period Data. This part of the program provides an ongoing flock status report at intervals selected by the producer. Hess elects to enter this data on a weekly basis, and advises that pullet growers may find two-week intervals sufficient. Information



The "hardware" may plant and harvest the corn at Dutch Dozens Farms, but Claude Hess emphasizes that his computer's software is the heartbeat of his 80,000-bird layer operation near Mastersonville.

on each period entered includes mortality, body weight, house temperature, eggs produced, average case weight, feed used, egg income, and expenses such as feed, medication, supplies, electricity, repairs and labor costs.

The next option is a feed ration program which records up to 30 rations and evaluates critical daily nutrient intake.

A fourth option allows the grower to evaluate his birds' performance against the guidelines established by the geneticist who developed his chosen strain of birds. Is his flock measuring up? This Stain Potentials menu enables the producer to spot problem areas before they can become profit-eating headaches.

The program's most spectacular "data cruncher" is its Layer Performance Management Summary. Here, a producer with a number of separate flocks can evaluate his entire operation during a given period within seconds. Care to find out your average feed cost per dozen of eggs in all 10 of your flocks from March 3 to July 1? Or how about your total egg mass value for all flocks during the same period. These as well as other vital data are available in the Summary. The computations for all this information require only about 10 seconds, or one second per flock.

In addition to the above tasks, the program can relist any prior report, provide a flock directory,

or a depreciation schedule on birds and equipment at the touch of a button.

Tim Shenk also points out that the program is "user friendly", meaning that a farmer need not be a computer whiz to use it effectively. Many safeguards against loss of information have been employed and any corrections made are instantly updated throughout the entire program.

Another "friendly" feature involves the availability of explanations of all language used throughout the program. If the user is confused, he need only press a button for an explanation of what's going on.

Hess hopes to publish and market his unique Layer Performance Report, with other programs, including a Pullet Performance Report, slated for later release. Development of these programs is underwritten by Heritage Poultry Management Services, Inc., a company formed by Mel Gehman of Annville, and Claude Hess a few years ago. In addition to program research and development, the company also provides feed formulation and pullet and layer flock analysis services to its customers.

Such programs are what programmers label "vertical" in nature, meaning they are highly specialized and of interest to a

small segment of the buying public.

Though his custom made programs aren't for every farmer, Hess stresses the importance of a computerized general accounting system in every farming operation. A basic system, Hess asserts, will pay for itself many times over through increased financial management efficiency.

"Ten years ago you couldn't buy nearly the system for a quarter of a million dollars that can be bought for \$2,000 today," he estimates.

And Hess quickly points out that a farmer doesn't need a doctorate to operate a computer.

"I'm no programmer and I'm not an academic man," he points out. "There are a lot of good drivers on the road who don't know the first thing about what's going on under the hood."

But even if Hess may not be sure about what's going on "under the hood" of his own computer, he is convinced that he would be lost without it today.

"The farmer of tomorrow is going to have a computer," Hess observes.

And rest assured that Claude Hess is determined to be among tomorrow's farmers.

"I'm going to be out front in management and efficiency, or I'm going to quit," he concludes.

And Claude Hess is no quitter.

## Avian progress reported

**HARRISBURG** — Pennsylvania Poultry Federation leaders and officials of the Avian Influenza Task Force are increasingly hopeful that the State-Federal quarantine may be lifted by Sept. 30 from 3,850 square miles in Lancaster County and parts of Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lebanon, and Schuylkill counties in Pennsylvania.

Tim Allwein, spokesman for the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation, said that cleaning and disinfection of a small number of premises and a 30-day waiting period are all that stand in the way of declaring Pennsylvania free of avian influenza.

"All infected and exposed flocks have been destroyed to eliminate sources of the flu virus, and only 21 affected premises remain to be cleaned and disinfected," Allwein

said. "We are working with Federation members and with the USDA to complete this job by Aug. 31, if possible."

Allwein noted that if that goal is reached — and no new evidence of flu infection is found — the area-wide quarantine could be released by September 30. Surveillance will continue for six months as a precaution against any new outbreaks of the disease.

Release of the quarantine will once more permit free movement of live poultry and poultry products from the area and hopefully end export restrictions imposed on Pennsylvania poultry by some 22 foreign countries. Currently live birds and hatching eggs cannot be moved out of the quarantine area, and special permits are required for all movements within the area.



And what comes first in Claude Hess's new program? Both the chicken and the egg, of course.



Messiah College's Tim Shenk (left) a senior computer science major, and William Strausbaugh, the College's computer science instructor, are the two programmers who devoted the past three months to developing Hess's Layer Performance program.