

What is a family farm?

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — "Save the family farm" was just one of the political polemics heard during this year's presidential campaign.

While everyone is for saving the "family farm," nobody can agree on its definition, according to agricultural economists at The University of Maryland.

"Politicians say apple pie, motherhood and family farms are good," Dr. Billy V. Lessley says. "But today's definition of the family farm differs from yesterday's."

The grandparents of today's farmer may have owned less than 100 acres and called it the "family farm," according to Lessley.

Children and grandchildren added to that base and now own or rent maybe 10 times more land than their ancestors, Dr. John W. Wysong adds.

"A Family farm today to a lot bigger than it was even 20 years ago," Wysong says. "Mechanization has made it possible for basically the same number of people to run a much

larger operation."

Since 1940, there has been little change in the total amount of acreage used for farming in Maryland and across the country, Wysong says. But the trend is toward fewer and larger farms.

During the last 20 years, the number of Maryland farms has dropped by 9,000, but the average size is up from 138 acres in 1960 to 150 in 1983, according to the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The growing Baltimore and Washington metropolitan areas have contributed to the decline in acreage of Maryland farms, economists say.

A look at national figures gives a more realistic view of what Lessley and Wysong are talking about. Since 1975 the general definition of a farm is a place that sells or normally would sell at least \$1,000 worth of agricultural produce.

In 1960, the average U.S. farm was 297 acres. Last year the national average was 437 acres with 141,000 acres less in the total farming plan. There are 1.5 million less farms now than in 1960, according to Maryland and USDA statistics.

Lessley says campaigning on the idea of protecting the "family" farm goes back to the Lydon Johnson Administration. However, Lessley and others are not sure the government's idea of the family farm has evolved as high finance and mechanization changed the industry.

Smaller operations are being replaced by farmers who can afford to use large, high efficiency equipment and buy materials in bulk quantities, the University economists conclude.

But politics has a way of changing what we see, Lessley says. Campaigners often look at the history of independent agriculture in American and see no reason why it can not continue in similar fashion.

Hort session slated Dec. 6

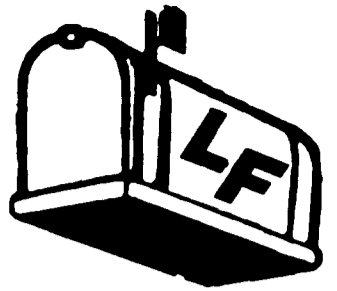
SALISBURY, Md. — The fruit and vegetable session of the Peninsula Horticultural Society will take place Thursday, Dec. 6, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. at the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center in Salisbury, Md.

The morning program will feature an update on farm labor legislation, quality in marketing produce, a panel presentation on marketing strategies, and a business meeting.

The afternoon half of the program will consist of two simultaneous sessions, one on sweet corn production and the other on strawberries. The sweet corn group will hear presentations on varieties and scheduling planting, a sweet corn pest management program, and cultural and marketing considerations of which growers should be aware. Strawberry producers will hear talks on a herbicide program, varieties for Delmarva, and "Everything Else You Wanted to Know About Strawberries."

For further information, contact county extension agents in Delaware or Eastern Shore Maryland and Virginia.

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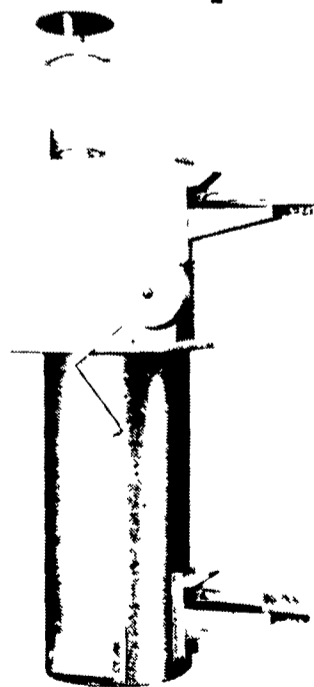
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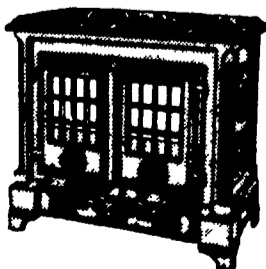
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