

# Dutch students visit Lancaster County

BY SALLY BAIR  
Staff Correspondent

LANCASTER — Thirty-five agricultural students from the Praktijkschool Horst in The Netherlands visited Lancaster County this week as part of a 15-day study tour throughout Canada and northeastern United States.

Henk von Dam, teacher at the school and trip organizer, said that the trip was designed to help the students see farms and learn practical applications of farming methods.

Explaining that the school is designed to offer a practical education in agriculture, von Dam said that 80 to 90 percent of the 400 students who attend the school throughout the year have a farming background. "Most will go back to the farm, and some will try to get a job in an agricultural business," he said.

As in this country, it is very difficult to buy a farm in The Netherlands, and for most young people the only possible way is to take over the parents' farm.

While dairying is the primary agricultural enterprise, von Dam said that the school, located in the south of the country, gets as many students for swine and horses as for dairy. Poultry students are the fewest in number, but that industry is becoming more important.

Von Dam said that the average farm in The Netherlands has about 40 milking cows and is 20 hectares in size. They have a strict quota system for milk, and farmers are paid for milk on the basis of fat and protein. Average production for that country is 5,600 kilograms.

For the students, there were not a lot of new ideas to be learned for the poultry and swine operations they visited on this continent, because their own industry is relatively new and very modern. In dairying, however, von Dam said, "The feeding is very different. We feed mostly pasture and

some grass and corn silage. We learned about the complete feed used here." Silage, he noted, is stored in bunkers, under plastic, not in silos which are so common in this country.

Dairy cattle in The Netherlands are mostly Friesian, with red and white more common in the south, where they remain dual purpose animals.

Promotion is important in the dairy industry, with a special commission set up to promote milk and cheese. He said the average person drinks 150 liters of milk per year.

A part of the European Economic Community, The Netherlands exports about 90 percent of their agricultural products. Von Dam said, "Farmers are not always happy about the EEG but they know what prices they will get." He added that there once was a lot of discussion about the Community, but that has slowed considerably.

The Praktijkschool Horst has grown to include 30 acres since its establishment in 1953, and offers both theoretical and practical education. The school has facilities for its 200 breeding sows, 60 fattening pigs, 10,000 laying hens, 3,000 pullets, 6,000 broilers and 60

cows and 40 calves. They also use the facilities of about 68 guest farms in the immediate area. The philosophy of the school is that each person must find his own area of specialization. In addition to courses which last for one year, there are others which are offered for shorter periods of time.

According to von Dam, up to 50 percent of students enrolled in agriculture at universities may be women. However the two women in the group of 35 more accurately reflects the population of the students at the practical schools, since "most farmers will be men."

In addition to visiting poultry, swine and dairy operations, the group visited research centers as they traveled in the northeast. In Lancaster County, they visited the Triple G Farms dairy after traveling through the local countryside.

They stayed primarily in campgrounds, and helped the budget by doing some of their own cooking.

Von Dam said that for the most part, the young students, who ranged in age from 18-23, were not surprised by what they observed in the United States. He said the excursion offered was an integral part of the program at the school.



Zoann Parker, Lancaster County 4-H agent, welcomes Henk von Dam, agricultural teacher from The Netherlands who is traveling in Northeastern United States with 35 of his students. They visited Lancaster County as part of a 15-day study tour.



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