

Do farmers need help getting started?

NEWARK, DE — Getting started in farming today is almost prohibitively expensive unless a beginning farmer inherits a farm, is independently wealthy, receives substantial help from family or friends, or is content to farm mostly rented land. In Delaware and Maryland the price to buy a farm averages over \$300,000 and may cost far more. To the expense of buying farmland and buildings must be added production costs for machinery and equipment, livestock, fertilizer, seed and other supplies.

For several years now, farmers have had to pay high interest rates to finance farm purchases and production costs. This places a heavy debt burden on beginning farmers, often resulting in negative cash flows and possibly failure within the first few years.

"Under the difficult economic conditions facing agriculture, prospects for beginning farmers remain bleak," says University of Delaware extension farm policy specialist Gerald F. Vaughn. "The average age of U.S. and Delmarva farmers is over 50 years. With entry costs so high in this occupation, who will replace them when they retire? Must their farms simply become part of still larger farms?"

Vaughn suggests that the process by which retiring farmers are replaced might be considered a matter of concern, and thus a public policy issue. "A number of states have launched programs to help beginning farmers, supplementing aid available through the Farmers Home Administration of USDA," he says. "Minnesota and North Dakota probably have the most successful models."

Such programs generally provide assistance to beginning farmers either in the form of 90 percent loan guarantees, interest payment subsidies or direct loans. There also are non-lending forms of assistance, including tax incentives for selling land to beginning farmers, land transfer systems and land trusts.

Though several of these programs date from the 1970s and have aided many beginning farmers, Vaughn says it's too soon to measure their impacts. However, he feels the programs may warrant study and discussion by farm organizations and public officials in Delmarva's three states.

"By enabling better cash flow during the critical start-up years, aid to beginning farmers improves their chances of becoming established and helps assure a healthy competitive agricultural industry, most capable of serving the public interest," the economist says.

Not everyone agrees that young farmers should get such assistance, however.

"Arguments against aid to beginning farmers also deserve attention," Vaughn says. "Some people feel that increasing the credit available to agriculture may encourage unwise farm expansion and push land prices

unrealistically upward. Also, established farmers who made it on their own may feel such aid is unfair interference with free enterprise competition.

"Too often," says the economist, "a beginning farmer makes the mistake of trying to start at the top, trying to succeed too fast. Instead, he or she should develop the farm business gradually, keeping its size consistent with

managerial ability and financial position.

"Delmarva public policymakers may want to consider the need for aid to beginning farmers, along with the likely impacts of specific forms of assistance," Vaughn concludes. "If an aid program is drafted, it probably should be tailored to Delmarva conditions, with aid carefully targeted to those who truly need it to start farming."

Maryland Holstein plaudits

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Skinner is secretary of his local Holstein club and a past county Holstein club and DHIA president. He is a state director for Sire Power, local 4-H club leader and livestock chairman for the Queen Anne County Fair.

W. I. "Billy" King, whose Irvington cattle have become nationally-known, was honored on Monday as the Maryland Senior Breeder of the year. King and his father purchased their first registered Holstein in 1937, at a sale at Lauxmont Farms, in Wrightsville, Pennsylvania.

Their early herd sire was of Donloggin breeding, tying the famed Donloggin lines to Canadian bloodlines added to the Irvington herd.

In the early 1950's, the Irvington herd was the largest purebred Holstein herd in the United States. Their show winnings include many Maryland State Fair awards, including six grand championships taken by homebred entries, and dozens of honors captured at shows throughout the Southeast region.

One of the farm's most well-known animals is Irvington Pride Admiral, EX-92, a sire whose name still commands pedigree respect. He and full brother Irvington Commander sold in 1961 to Curtiss Breeding Service in Carey, Ill., for \$60,000, believed to be a record price for such a pair at that time.

King counts numerous All-American and All-Maryland

awards among the Irvington honors. Over the years he's developed over fifty 100,000-pound producers.

King also earned a place in Maryland Holstein history for helping put together the "Astronaut" syndicate. He selected Paclamar Astronaut, a son from Paclamar Farms in Boulder, Colo., for a national convention sale, hosted in 1964 by the Maryland Holstein Association. The buying syndicate of ten arranged for semen to be distributed through Curtiss, and

Paclamar Astronaut went on to become one of the all-time Holstein great sires, with 53,949 daughters in 12,569 herds.

King's service to the industry has included serving as director and president of the state Holstein Association, former director of Maryland and Virginia Milk Producers, and various roles of leadership to dairy youth. He has also served on the Maryland Agriculture Commission, the state's Wholesale Meat Advisory Board and takes part in a host of civic and community activities.



The Billy King family was honored as the Maryland Senior Holstein Breeders of the Year. From left are Russell Wachter, Cloverdale Farm, the trophy sponsor, "Moe" King, Billy Jean Jacobs, Billy King, James Jacobs, and Kay and Amy Berman.



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