



Brockett's Ag Advice

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Staying in business

There will be farmers around as long as people need to be fed. Family farms such as we have in much of Pennsylvania are still and probably always will be the most efficient types of farms. I firmly believe that we will have successful family farms in Pennsylvania for the rest of my lifespan and for a good deal longer than that.

The only unfortunate thing is that many of the good family farms in business today will no longer be able to compete in the food and fiber market tomorrow.

However, this is no different than it has been in the past.

Since the beginning of time, the number of farmers in relation to the general population has declined. There has been the general exodus of farmers each year as new types of industry and business have opened.

Many times in the past these businesses paid a premium for farm boys because they know how to work.

There has also been the disaster type of exodus. The big depression of the '30s, the drought of the '60s.

the flood in 1972, and more recently the credit crunch of the early '80s. This last one is still taking its toll on the farming community.

Despite adversities in the past, the farming community has always been able to pick itself up and go on (even if at times with a bloodied but unbowed head). Farmers in general will weather this series of setbacks as well.

Leading agriculture out of the present mess will be the ever present "family farm". Those who will be in the lead will be those who have learned a lesson from the recent disaster.

What Lessons?

Every disaster teaches a lesson or lessons to those who are willing and able to pay attention and learn. I remember the drought of the '60s. It caused the gap that separated the poor farmers from the average farmers and the average farmers from the good farmers to widen.

Those who learned from the drought, with its expensive feed and low crop production became better users of scarce resources. Some learned how to feed cows

more efficiently. Some learned how to lime and fertilize more effectively. Some learned the value of a winter cover crop in conserving water.

Others learned how to do a more effective job of borrowing. The most useful things that those who prospered, despite the drought, learned was the value of records and the analysis of those records.

One lesson from this most recent disaster for the farming community is the responsible use of borrowed money. I would be the first to agree that not all of the present credit problem was due to irresponsible use of borrowed money.

After all who could project those spiraling interest rates of a few years ago? Or who could have projected the 20 to 30% drop in land value in much of Pennsylvania since the start of the '80s? However, those who want to remain in business over the next number of years will have to do whatever it takes to correct this situation, then go on from there.

Another lesson that farmers who stay in business may learn is that they may have to sell off assets in order to preserve their main assets.

One of the most difficult assets to sell is land that is right next door. Yet this may have to go if the farm is to continue as a business.

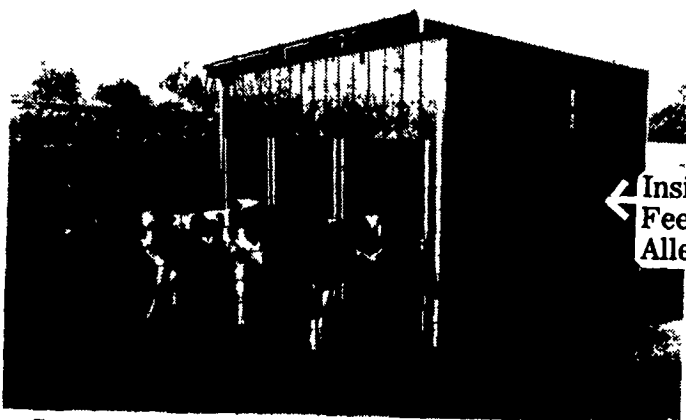
Perhaps a farmer will have to line up some long term leases on land rather than insist he or she has to own it all. Or perhaps that farmer will have to gear himself or herself to purchasing feed as opposed to growing it all.

I would agree that in some years growing it is cheaper than purchasing it. But remember this: A dairy livestock farmer may be just as far ahead to buy grain feed even when it is expensive because he could then put more time and effort into working with the animal enterprise. That could result in enough extra income to offset the extra cost of the feed.

The most difficult part of selling land is to sell it at a price that is less than its cost. People who buy and sell stocks get hung up on the same problem and some of them make a living buying and selling stocks.

Once when I was a prison farm guard, a habitual gambler told me that one of the big lessons in being a successful gambler was to know when to hang tough and when to fold up a hand. That same thing may well be true in life.

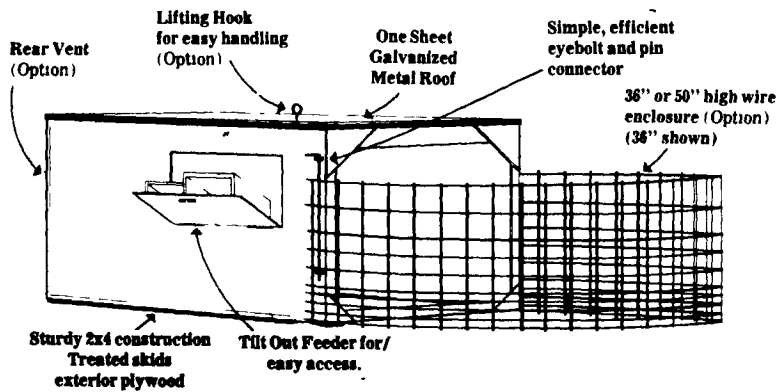
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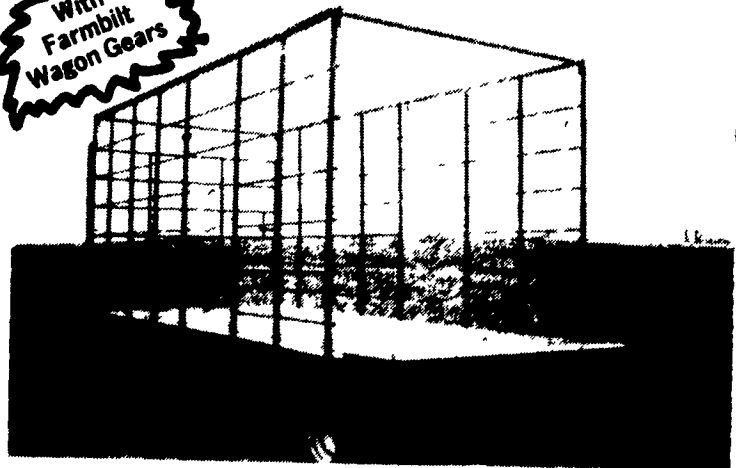
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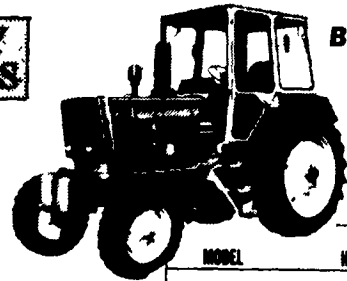
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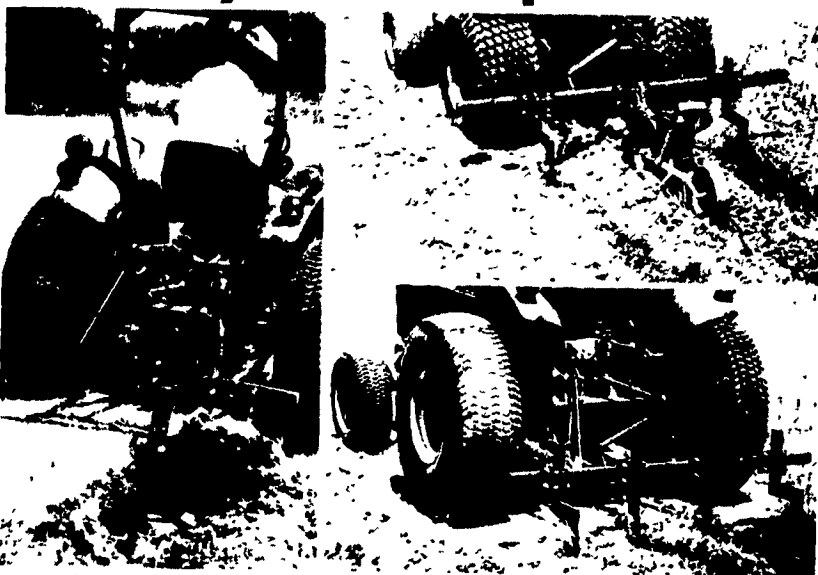


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