

Farm vacations could bring needed income

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These are tough days! The government tells us there are too many dairy farmers in the country. There is too much milk produced, too much corn grown, beef prices are down, red meat is in surplus. Even gasoline prices are coming down, which means burning manure into biogas and corn into ethanol is not economically attractive. What can a farmer do besides shoot himself? Plenty!

Many of our farmers are sitting on choice land like the scenic Susquehanna shores around Nottingham and Wrightsville, along the Bohemia River and the inlets of the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays. Many of our farms have old, historically interesting farm houses. In many cases all it would take is a paint brush to get these delapidated clapboards spruced up, and a few flowers planted around the house.

In other cases it would take a little more carpentry repair and landscaping to become attractive. However, the historical societies in this area and on the federal level have programs of financial support for historically interesting houses to preserve them and to get them back into shape.

Many of our farm houses are at least 100 years old, (I know, I live in one, and am surrounded by several) and then qualify for support from historical registry.

Of course, this is not a panacea for everybody. It requires an outgoing attitude of wanting to work with people and not being angry at trivial details and impatient. However, being a dairy farmer is an excellent opportunity of acquiring patience with cantankerous cows, stubborn calves and other temperamental animal behavior challenges during milking, feeding and breeding.

Also, Eastern Milk Producers Cooperative has award programs for "Farm Beautification", a good

step in this direction of enabling side income from vacation on the farm or similar ideas. In Wisconsin, along a major highway I saw an attractive farmstead converted to a petting zoo with young farm animals and a big sign visible from fary saying "Old McDonald Had a Farm"!

Some of our farms could look just as attractive as those in Switzerland, Austria and Germany that everybody raves about and spends thousands of dollars annually to see. Why don't we copy their ideas — old ideas, I'll admit — and have a pretty looking farm house outside and inside with attractive, well-kept pastures around the house.

With clean, well-tended cows, sheep, horses, goats, ducks, geese and the like, and a horse team working some fields around the house, wouldn't that get the cameras clicking!

Our brothers and sisters from the city would love to see that and come from far, as they already do in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. It is possible to introduce some of this nostalgia throughout the region especially along its many scenic shores?

On my farm tours of Europe we see such scenes every year. Why not here too? Why not promote vacations on the farm as an old idea for new farm income?

Such enterprises could bring direct sales income to the farm from bed and breakfast accommodations, pony rides, perhaps dude ranching for reducing diets, and simple soul recharge from plain country living and fresh country air.

One of my silent and last wishes is to be invited back to an old-fashioned farm for a vacation where I can work again with horse teams like I did when I grew up on a small farm in Germany, walking barefooted behind a single plow in the furrow when hilling potatoes.

Work down by the stress of modern society and fast

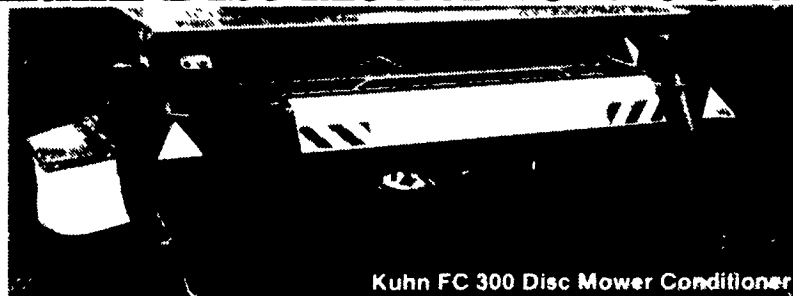
technology, today many of us yearn to go back to nature, to the plain and simple life. Why can't some of our hard-pressed farms provide this opportunity, turning it into a new source of income?

Our farms aren't just here to produce food! They offer a way of life as well. Put some fields back into pasture, convert some tractors back to horse teams, let some cows graze out there again — maybe with some other livestock, too — instead of keeping them standing in those muddy barn

yards. It will be attractive and the economics of reduced cash outlays plus new tourist income from renting rooms might just make economic sense. It does in Switzerland and Austria, why not here? Perhaps the time is right to bring back some good old ideas.

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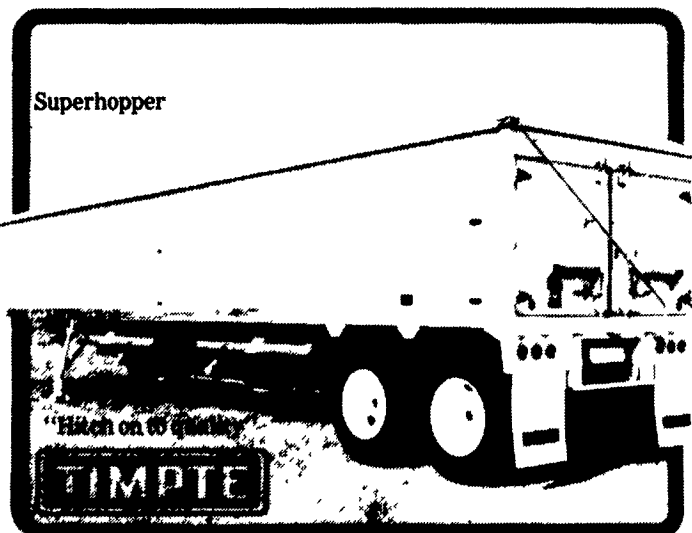
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