



# Farm Talk

By  
**Jerry Webb**

There is a prevailing philosophy in this great land of ours that if a person works hard, he or she will be successful. A full time job will yield an income at least adequate for the basics of contemporary life.

Right now a lot of farmers are saying that's not so. That no matter how hard they work, for how long they just aren't making it. That there is an inequity in agriculture. These farmers feel the game is stacked against them, because a full time job no longer yields an income adequate for the basics.

But is that really the case? Are most of the failing farmers you read about fully employed? And how about you don't read about—the ones that are quietly sinking into debt without fanfare or headline.

Typically, the farmers who are going broke in the corn belt and even on the Delmarva peninsula are corn and soybean farmers. Their financial fate rests with the price of corn and soybeans. And most would agree that a difference in price starting in the early 80's has been their downfall. When the price turned, they tried harder to produce more corn and soybeans and to do it more efficiently—greater yields at lower costs per bushel. And still they weren't successful because the price per bushel continued to fall.

Four or five years of that kind of struggle has left them frustrated and many of them dead broke. But have they really come to grips with the problem? Given the current situation and the outlook for corn and soybeans over the next five or maybe even ten years—there isn't much chance for high profits growing corn and soybeans. And beyond that many farmers are just not fully employed.

When times were good a lot of farmers expanded very rapidly adding more acres, more equipment, more debt and more headaches. Then when the situation turned around they were forced to cut back. That meant giving up rented acres. Perhaps even selling or losing recently purchased land. The net effect—fewer acres to till but with the same amount of time available to do the work. Debt loads may have been reduced, risks and operating expense cut but nothing happened to assure any new income or to utilize the idle time resulting from some of those cut-back decisions. A farmer who considered himself fully employed tilling 800 acres can no longer make that claim farming 400. Not if he is still growing corn and soybeans.

And look at the other things that have happened along the way. Between their boyhood days and middle age where a lot of troubled farmers find themselves now there have been a lot of changes in agriculture. Changes that have made the farmer more efficient. Plowing ground with a two-bottom sulky plow and five mules as I did many years ago makes me painfully aware of the difference between how things were then and how things are now.

The farmer who was fully employed on 120 acres 50 years ago grew a variety of crops including feed for his horse power and he tended a wide range of livestock including dairy cows, beef cows,

hogs, chickens, horses and maybe even sheep. Compare that to his son or grandson who may now be

tilling 500 acres of corn and soybeans with a variety of large machines— self propelled and otherwise. That 120 acre farm that wa a full time job for father or grandfather is no more than 3 or 4 weeks work with today's technology. And 500 acres is by the longest stretch of the imagination 4 months work. So where is the full-time job? And where is the quarrel with the great American dream that a full-time job yields the basics of life?

Today's corn and soybean farmer may be doomed by the very technology that has created them. He can in fact control only so much land, machinery and capital and therefore, only manage so many acres devoted to corn and soybean

production. In today's market, the maximum production from the most efficient of those producers is barely enough. And for those who are less than maximum the results can be downright disastrous.

There are farmers who have found a way to back out of the corn and soybean syndrome and develop other ways to broaden their income base. For some that has meant broiler production, vegetable crops, fruit trees, a roadside stand or some other agricultural enterprise. For others it has meant going beyond the farm gate to other activities and enterprises— like driving a school bus, building houses, selling agricultural supplies, becoming an auctioneer, hiring out to perform a variety of services needed in the

agricultural sector or somewhere else.

Some farmers need to take a hard look at their corn and soybean enterprises and realize that the scope of their particular farming operations will never yield a good income in the current economic climate. The very best yields at current depressed market prices aren't going to make it. Those farmers have got to come to grips with that economic phenomenon and also come to grips with the fact that they are not fully employed. And that excess labor can be devoted to something else. Once those decisions are made, the opportunity for increased income is limited only by the skills and the imagination of those farmers.

## Montgomery County 4-H Showcase presents 4-H program



Montgomery County 4-H'ers recently held a 4-H Showcase at the 4-H center in Creamery. The event was designed to introduce the public to what 4-H has to offer.

On hand for the showcase were from left, Tricia Curtis, alternate dairy princess and vice president of the Western Mont-Berks 4-H Dairy Club; Magic the Cow; and Lisa Ruth, Montgomery County dairy princess. This trio distributed milk to guests and talked to visitors about milk's benefits.



Andy Kumpf, right, discusses his sheep project with future 4-H'er Alex Young.

Joe Lippy, one of the well-known and successful Lippy Brothers Inc. at Hampstead, MD. is pictured with Ray Layser of the Asgrow Seed Company. Joe and Ray discussed new varieties for 1986 and how they compare with the Asgrow varieties the Lippy's are using now. Good soybean growers continually look for the new variety which will do a better job for them. Joe is no exception!

Lippy Brothers have grown Asgrow brand soybean seed for about six to eight years. Joe doesn't recall exactly how long it has been. They plant about 2500 acres of soybeans each year, most of which are Asgrow's! Joe prefers Asgrow because it has good vigor - standability - holds into harvest by resisting shattering - and is dependable year after year. Joe's final comment is, "If there is nothing better, we don't fool with it."

See your SEEDWAY dealer soon. Get Asgrow soybean seed - the only seed with Asgrow soybean research and quality in every bag!



Ray Laser - Joe Lippy

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