

Danish Farmers Compare Cultures on Farm Tour

BY GINGER MYERS

Adams County Correspondent
GETTYSBURG — "How much money do you make and how long do you work?" This was the common question asked by a group of thirty-two Danish farmers and their wives as they toured four Adams County farms recently as part of a 12 day tour through the mid-Atlantic states.

The group, representing dairy, hog, and crop producers, was hosted by the Adams County Farmers Association while in Pennsylvania. They toured a dairy operation at the John Hess farm, James Sanders' hog farm, the Round Hill Foods, Inc. turkey processing plant, and the Peters Farms orchards.

The tour was organized by Svend and Inge Jacobsen and Ole and Virginia Holst. Jacobsen is an agricultural teacher in Denmark and he and his wife had taken the same group on a tour of farms in Russia last summer.

Ole and Virginia Holst came along with the group on their bi-annual visit to Virginia's father's farm in Harney, Md. Ole and Virginia met in 1963 when Ole was Denmark's representative to the world plowing contest held that year in Canada.

Ole had been an agricultural exchange student in Pennsylvania in 1953 and returned to visit his host family after the contest. It was during that visit that he met Virginia who was a registered nurse. Virginia lived in Denmark for a year before marrying Ole.

Following their marriage Ole farmed full-time and Virginia continued her nursing. Interest in bringing a group with them to the states on one of their return visits prompted Virginia to contact her family who then contacted the Adams County Farmers Association and set-up the county tour and a tour of the Gettysburg historical area.

The continued itinerary of the group included visits to Washington, D.C., Williamsburg,

and Philadelphia. Their time spent in Adams County was their only time devoted solely to visiting farms. Serving as tour director for them while in the states was Bente Arquin, a native of Denmark, now working with Greyhound.

At Jo-Bo Dairy Farm, John and Bonnie Hess, Gettysburg, the Danes were impressed with the totally computerized feed and milking system. Surrounded by modern technology, the Danes questioned their host as to the respectability of his profession in this country. The Danes find themselves to be less respected in their homeland than other professions in spite of their government paid agricultural education.

To be a "qualified farmer" in Denmark, a person must first complete one year of practical experience. This involves working away on other farms for only your room and board. Next the student receives five months of classroom study called "the first course".

Then the student leaves school for two to three more years of practical experience. The final classroom experience is a nine month extensive program concluded by final exams. If the student passes his exams, he is designated a qualified farmer and receives a green chart. The green chart may then be used as proof of qualification for special low-interest government loans to the student the first time he establishes his own farm.

Ole Holst explains that just like in the states, there is a concern about bringing on the next crop of young farmers. Debt load and long working hours are a detriment.

He explains that hired labor is hard to come by in Denmark and that your labor must be paid overtime after working for eight hours, must be given regular days off each week, must be given extended holiday time, and that everyone in Denmark gets five weeks of vacation time. Most young farmers can not afford this, so they do

everything themselves. The labor problem also limits their farm size. For example, most dairy operations are only 40 to 50 cows since that's all a single family can handle.

Also, he went on to explain that most of the established farmers have the capital to outbid a young farmer for both land and equipment. In an effort to prevent large corporate farming in Denmark and to make more land available for sale, the government forbids anyone from owning more than two farms.

The group took great interest in James Sanders, Gettysburg, hog operation since most of them were pork producers themselves. Sanders and his three sons operate a 200 sow operation, farrow to finish. Most of the visitors commented that in Denmark hogs must be grown in more closed housing than is permissible in this area due to the colder Danish winters.

Ole Horst, who is a pork producer, explained that two-thirds of all pork produced in Denmark goes for export into the European Economic Community (EEC). The majority of this pork goes to England as bacon. Denmark exported 10.5 thousand million Danish crowns worth of bacon and pork meats in 1984. Eight Danish crowns equal \$1.00. Their other exports include butter, cheese, canned meats, and furs. In 1984 Denmark's total agricultural exports were valued at 43,512 thousand million crowns.

On the import side of the scale, machinery, fertilizer, chemicals, and protein sources such as soybeans and cottonseed, account for the majority of agricultural products imported. Danish farmers produce their own corn and sugar beets for silage for their dairy cows. They also grow barley, wheat, and a small amount of oats. Their small grains are used to finish hogs to about 200 pounds. Their average cow production is similar to their U.S. counterparts.

Their tour of Round Hill's turkey processing plant provided them



John Hess, center, welcomes a group of Danish farmers to tour his Bo-Jo Dairy. Hess milks 150 cows and has a computerized feeding and milking system.

with a unique look at the latest in poultry processing. Round Hill Foods, Inc., is the 18th largest turkey producer in the country with a fully integrated operation.

None of the members of the group were involved in poultry production, but many questioned the working relationship between Round Hill and its 32 contracted growers. The Danes expressed a mistrust for this type of contracting since they view the farmer as only a laborer for the big company in this situation.

The final stop on the tour was at Peters Orchards, York Springs. Peters Orchards consist of 2,000 acres of orchards located in the heart of the county's 25,000 acre fruit belt. John Peters, President of Peters Orchards, Inc., met with the group and explained much of the work-a-day operations.

The Danes have a keen interest in chemicals and their application in farming and are spraying more in Denmark now than fertilizing. Peters related that the average fruit farm in his area is spending between \$100 to \$150 per acre for herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides. Peters continued to

explain that his three greatest costs are chemicals, labor and related taxes, and finally equipment and buildings.

The Danes produce little fruit in their homeland since Denmark is a member of the E.E.C. and most of their fruit is imported from France, Italy, and southern Germany. Local Danish producers can not compete with the lower prices of the imported fruits. Approximately two-thirds of all of Denmark's farm products are marketed by farm cooperatives on the Common Market.

Following a long day of touring, the group retired to a special picnic and bonfire at the Francis Hull farm in Harney. Their celebration coincided with a similar celebration being held in Denmark that same night. June 23rd is St. Hans Day in Denmark. It is the longest day of the year in Denmark and it is their custom to celebrate the nearly 24 hours of daylight with picnics and bonfires.

Tradition has it that the fires are to chase the witches back to Germany on their broomsticks. It seems that the sleepy little village of Harney got a witch purging this year too.



Danish tour group members view the hog operation of James Sanders, Gettysburg, during a day long tour of four farms in Adams County. The county tour was hosted by the Adams County Farmers Association. Pork production is a major agricultural commodity in Denmark.



Adams County Farmers Association President Atlee Keefer explains an Adams County soil map in dairyman John Hess's office to Danish visitor Ole Holst. Holst is part of a Danish farm group touring the mid-Atlantic state recently.



MAMMA Congratulates Cal Ripken

Byron (Barney) Meredith, Treasurer of the Middle Atlantic Milk Marketing Association (M.A.M.M.A.) congratulates Oriole's third baseman, Cal Ripken, Jr., for a great job of promoting milk in a pre-game ceremony on "Jacket" night, Thursday, June 19, 1986, at Baltimore's Memorial Stadium. Ripken is seen and heard in local milk commercials sponsored by M.A.M.M.A. and run in the Baltimore, Washington, York-Harrisburg and Philadelphia markets on radio and TV.