

Drought-Plagued York County Gains Disaster Status

BY JOYCE BUPP

York County Correspondent
YORK — By mid-week, York County farmers heard the announcement they had been awaiting since July.

York County was officially declared a crop disaster area, making drought-plagued producers eligible for federal emergency feed and financial assistance. Crop losses are estimated at 70 percent, a \$47 million loss in county crop production income.

The USDA disaster program automatically extends to adjoining counties, making farmers in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin and Lancaster counties eligible to apply for emergency assistance.

That disaster announcement came Tuesday, just 24 hours after a visit to parched southern York County by USDA assistant secretary Wilmer D. Mizell. During his visit to York County, Mizell, a former Alabama congressman, was hosted and accompanied by 19th District Congressman Bill Goodling, Jim McMullen from the Washington offices of ASCS, and a delegation of state and local officials which included Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Luther Snyder.

Stops were made at three area farms hard hit by the continuing lack of rain along the Mason-Dixon line. Farms visited included Wolfe farms, an egg, potato and grain operation run by the George Wolfe and sons families, the Blevins Fruit Farms, operated by the Eugene Blevins family, and the grain farm of Charles and David Trout, all in the rural outskirts of Stewartstown.

What Mizell saw on his York visit

were undersized potatoes, peaches too small even for processing use, soybeans and hay fields going into blossom with little growth and tasseling corn, in some cases less than half the normal height, and setting small, stunted ears. Some corn may set no ears at all.

Mizell noted that immediate rains would help salvage some late crops, but that there is "no hope for harvest in some fields. And in some areas (of the country), it's too far gone for help."

Congressman Goodling, who had been instrumental in arranging Mizell's farm visits Monday, was "extremely pleased with the decision to give assistance."

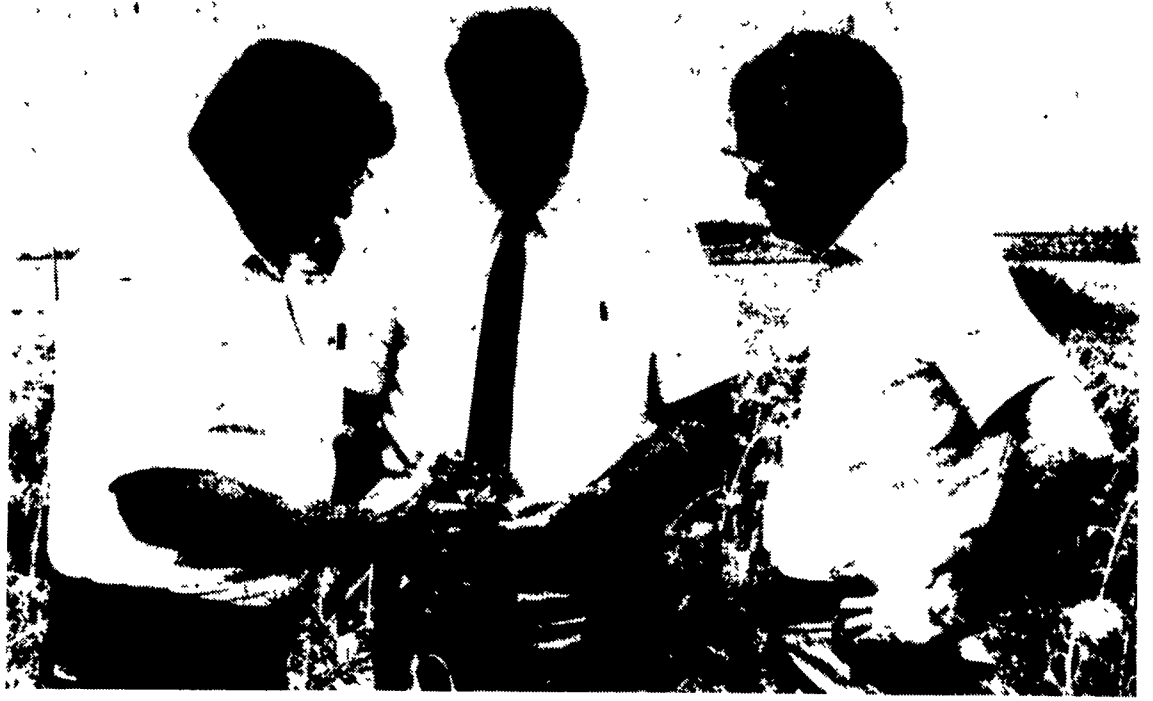
"Hopefully, this will make a dent in the problem farmers in the area are experiencing," said Kevin Melchoir, a spokesman in Goodling's Washington congressional offices.

Local federal agriculture officials do not anticipate an immediate rush of applications for assistance since the total extent of the crop losses will not be known until after harvest is completed.

However, some livestock producers are already running low on feed grains, with reduced harvests of early feed grain crops and little promise of adequate corn and bean yields.

According to Wayne Kurtz, York ASCS head, most livestock producers in the drought-stricken portions of the county will probably qualify for some assistance. Applicants will need to inventory feed on hand and numbers of livestock.

Kurtz does not expect application approvals to be a lengthy, time-consuming process, but farmers are urged to look ahead 60 to 90 days to their needs.



An undersized, barely-filled-out sunflower head went back to Washington with USDA assistant secretary Wilmer Mizell center, as an example of severe drought-related crop problems in York County. Accompanying Mizell on his visit were 19th District congressman Bill Goodling, right, and York County Extension Agent Tony Dobrosky.

For farmers unable to obtain credit elsewhere, financial assistance of up to 80 percent of confirmed crop losses is available at low cost interest, through the Farmers Home Administration.

Ron Kraszewski of the York FmHA office notes that applicants must get certification from two other commercial lenders that they do not qualify for credit. Only full-time farmers planning to continue farming are eligible.

New FmHA applicants will need to establish production history on the last five years of crop production, which will be averaged

and compared with 1986 yields. At least a 30 percent total loss on all crops must be established for an applicant to qualify for assistance.

York County farmers with questions on the disaster emergency assistance programs may call the ASCS office at 755-2801 and the Farmers Home Administration at 757-7635.

USDA has also granted disaster status to much of the Southeast, putting into action several programs available to hard-hit farmers through the 1985 Farm Bill.

That includes the Feed Cost-

Sharing Program, formerly the Emergency Feed Program, under which USDA shares with producers the cost of purchasing feed grains and hay. Cost sharing is up to 50 percent of feed costs, up to 5 cents per pound — formerly 3 cents per pound — of feedgrain equivalent.

These cost share payments are to be made in generic certificates, which can be redeemed for either cash, or for CCC commodities.

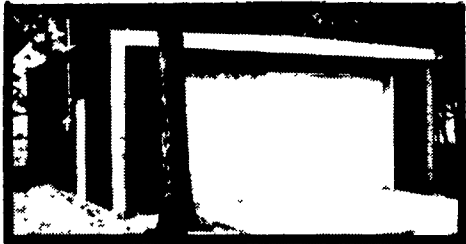
In announcing expanded disaster-aid programs, on Aug. 1, Secretary of Agriculture Richard

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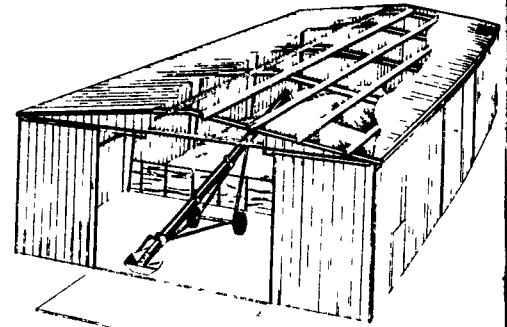
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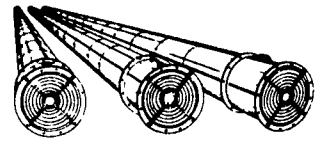
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