

Farmer Sees Drought Conditions For Himself

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cut of hay. This year he got 150 bales, but he'd given most of that away to neighbors because his need wasn't so bad then. He'd figured the drought wouldn't last forever, Gray recalls.

Gray was appalled by the conditions that the farmer was suffering. "He had a feeder calf operation, but nothing to feed the calves," Gray explains. "Because there was no grass left, he'd fenced off an acre or so of woods and was letting his animals pasture there, using the leaves for food. He said when the low leaves were gone, he'd have the wood cleared out and sold for lumber but would save the top leaves for forage. The day I was there, he had a lumber company in, taking out trees elsewhere on his land and leaving him the leaves as feed."

When he returned home, Gray was invited to tell television and newspaper reporters in western Pennsylvania about what he saw. Although the media coverage lasted only a few days, Gray doesn't want Pennsylvania farmers to forget.

"What I saw there could happen to any one of us. There's no one who can predict a drought like

that. Even if they could, how many of us would believe it ahead of time?" Gray asks.

Gray, at age 56, understands the spirit of farming that doesn't appear on the balance sheets. "I was raised on a farm, and even though I didn't have a farm waiting for me when I became an adult, I felt that farming was always with me." He recalls watching his grandfather threshing and milking the cows by hand, and small joys such as, "the way birds follow the tractor, diving into the furrows after worms you turn up." He found a career in the fuel business; he was able to purchase his own farm and start his second career a dozen years ago.

"I asked the farmer who was hit so hard if he was going to give up. He said, 'They may come to take this land away from me, but if they do, they'll find me in a corner screaming and kicking, fighting them the whole way. This is my life, and I'm not going to give it up without a fight.' I think there's a piece of that fight in everyone who farms," Gray remarks.

In addition to learning first-hand about the plight of southern farmers, Gray adds that he's gained a new respect for truck drivers.

When interviewed, he'd just spent several days on the phone trying to locate trucks to transport hay from Butler County and was hoping to accompany another load south later this week.

"This operation wouldn't work at all if it wasn't for the truckers, especially the independents," he says. He noted that some who have been idled by the USX strike have volunteered their rigs and time, as have drivers who haul lumber and other loads from the south. "One night after I'd been on TV, I got a call from a trucker. He said he and his wife were sitting around the living room when they saw me on the news. His wife reminded the trucker that he was going south for a load of watermelons the next day and said, 'why don't you do something decent for a change?' So he volunteered to help."

Gray says that many of the truckers get involved despite their own hardships, such as work lost to the strike. He was especially struck by the cooperation of Lonnie Lauver, a Brownsville, Pa., trucker who's had a run of bad luck lately. Lauver's truck was stolen recently, then an accident left him with crushed vertebrae in his back. When Lauver volunteered to help haul the hay with his new rig, he

told Gray, "Maybe if I do something nice for someone else, my luck will change."

During unloading in Virginia, Lauver's new truck was struck by a motorist, bending the truck's axle. "You'd expect a man who's had that much hardship to throw up his hands and back off," Gray says. "But on the way home he said to me, 'I'll take another load next week.'"

Gray says what he's seen has made him feel good. "I'm constantly amazed at the heart some people have." He adds that Pennsylvania farmers should know their gift is being gratefully accepted in the south.

"One farmer told me when the call came from his extension agent saying there was a load of hay coming from the north, he got a tingling feeling right from the top of his head down to his toes. That kind of appreciation is worth

hearing about," he notes.

Gray still cherishes the small things he saw on his trip. "We drove all night, and as daylight broke we were in Virginia and we could see farmers going out to do their milking. They'd stop what they were doing and wave to us. As we drove on, people everywhere would wave or give us the thumbs-up sign." He even recalls a state trooper who caught the trucks speeding by on his radar but gave an OK signal out his window and didn't stop them. "I've been halfway around the world, but that morning was one of the highlights of my life," Gray says.

He concludes, "The 50 bales of hay I gave didn't mean anything. It was the appreciation I saw that was important. If other farmers asked me what they should do, from my experience I'd say send hay until it hurts and then throw on an extra hundred bales."

State Championship Holstein Show Set

STATE COLLEGE — The Pennsylvania Holstein Association's Fall Championship Show is set for Thursday, September 4, 1986, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Agricultural Arena on the Penn State University campus. The judge for the top Holstein Show in the state will be John Morris from Frederick, Maryland.

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The 1986 Keystone Futurity winner will also be selected. The participants will split prize money in excess of \$1,000.

Make plans now to be in State College on September 4 to observe Pennsylvania's finest Holstein cattle. More information on the Show can be obtained by contacting the Pennsylvania Holstein Association, 839 Benner Pike, State College, PA 16801, 814-234-0364.



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