



Brockett's Ag Advice

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When Will Prices Stop Falling?

Does that sound like a familiar refrain? It is not only farm commodities that have falling prices. The prices of many other commodities such as oil, metals, and even money are also falling. Agriculture benefits from the reduction in price for some of these items such as oil and some chemicals. Initially the politicians were happy to see these prices fall, because it looked good in their reports to the people back home when they said "cost of living goes down." Now some of them are having second thoughts about this "commodity deflation." The problem was too rapid of a decline in such a short period of time. Thus, some of Agriculture's prime customers, with falling prices of their own, were no longer able to buy our farm commodities. Thus, their falling commodity prices helped to cause our commodity prices to fall.

It is interesting to read about this world-wide problem because it mirrors the problem faced by American farms today. Almost everyone believed that commodity price increases were almost a given. As a result, lenders encouraged producers to borrow more and more money. The U.S. government did its part by making, underwriting or guaranteeing additional loans. Almost no one was turning commodity loans down. As loans increased, the need to make more money to service those debts resulted in more and more production. Oversupply began to develop. World demand began to weaken in relation to available supplies, yet producers had to continue to produce to their fullest extent and of course borrow more money to increase production even further. Does this sound familiar, as if I was talking about farmers and farm commodities? Well farm commodities are one of the problems, but the item could just as easily be any other commodity such as silver, oil, aluminum, iron, zinc, rayon, or paper. Farmers, just like the producer countries with an oversupply of commodities, are continuing to overproduce in order to pay their debts.

What Can Be Done?

This is a question without an answer. Some of the things an individual farmer can do to overcome his or her own problem may be repugnant to that individual. One of the solutions that an individual has is to change jobs. This is not as simple as it appears in writing.

First, the individual must become convinced that the change will benefit the family members. Second, the individual must become convinced that there could be satisfaction in doing as well as possible in an area other than farming. Then the individual must be sure that working in this other area would be financially advantageous to him or her. Finally, the individual must realize that there is no stigma attached to

leaving farming. In some ways this last item is the most difficult to accept. The degree of education has little, if any, bearing on acceptance of the fact that operating a farm may not be possible. I have worked with people with advanced college degrees who were as adamant about their right to farm as those with no educational degrees. Many farmers who are actually failing in the farm business have skills and/or knowledge that could result in substantial increases of income, yet refuse to use these resources so they can farm. Circumstances may be blamed, but not really accepted as a reason for discontinuing farming. Sometimes it appears as though farming is an addiction.

Farmers in states like Pennsylvania have several alternatives outside of farming if they wish to pursue them. In the past, as well as now, many Pennsylvania farmers have become part-time farmers with a regular full time job along with their farm. For those who feel they might be interested in this direction, there is a correspondence course written to assist people in deciding which part time enterprise to pursue. Being a part-time farmer can be an end in itself or could be a way to ease out of farming or could be a good supplement to the off farm job income. As with full-time farmers, planning and records are important if profits are a goal.

Most farmers in Pennsylvania can get a job outside of the farm if they truly desire to do so. Farmers have a reputation of knowing how to work. This reputation gives a farmer seeking off farm employment an edge over other equally qualified candidates for a particular job. Also consider the many and varied job experiences a farmer has had. Some farmers in the past have obtained part time farm jobs in addition to the non-farm job. These part-time farm jobs range from doing occasional weekend chores for a neighboring farmer to harvest time employment. Some former farmers say they enjoy the farm work more now than they did before when debt payments were such a worry. Both part-time farming and part-time farm jobs can help a former farmer to adapt to a new way of life. Some former farmers with a college education have been able to use that college degree and their farm experience to become farm advisors with banks and other lending institutions, extension service, feed companies, or other ag related businesses or services. Others have started up their own ag related businesses. I know that once a person has worked in the field of agriculture, it is very difficult to leave that area of work. I have only to look at myself as an example. I was never interested in moving away from agriculture despite the lure of more money and less hours elsewhere. I also have been a part-time farmer for most of my life.

Sigrist Appointed Conservationist

COLLEGE PARK, MD — Michael P. Sigrist has been appointed assistant state conservationist for field office production for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in Maryland. The promotion was announced recently by Pearlie S. Reed, state conservationist.

"I'm excited to be in this new

position," Sigrist said. "I am looking forward to working in all counties in the state."

Sigrist, 36, will supervise the employees in the state's 23 field offices and area field specialists. According to Reed, Sigrist will be responsible for coordinating programs and lending special assistance to field offices



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