

Farmer Opens Grain Warehouse In Northampton

BY ED SHAMY

Northampton Co. Correspondent

NORTHAMPTON — A natural limestone deposit that cuts across Northampton County's midsection led to the creation of one of the nation's most concentrated, and oldest, groups of cement plants.

But before there was cement, there was farming, and so it seemed appropriate that farmers and agricultural leaders gathered last week at a former cement factory to rechristen the massive plant as a grain storage warehouse.

David Fink, 35, of Germansville, Lehigh County, masterminded the Atlas Grain Corp. venture after attending a marketing seminar sponsored last fall by the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association.

It hit home then that farmers in Lehigh and Northampton counties often struggle to sell their products, and often end up hauling commodities long distances to sell, said Fink.

Fink cultivates 800 acres of hay, and exports some of it to Caribbean nations. He knows the importance of markets, and of selling to the right place at the right time.

He began to search for a location where grain could be stored while farmers lined up their best deals after harvest, and he was attracted to the Atlas Cement Co. plant between Northampton and Bath.

The plant was huge, that was easily seen by the towering concrete silos that rose above the treetops. It was accessible, just off Route 329 with a railroad track cutting through the property. And it was near the border of Northampton and Lehigh counties.

Fink pitched the idea to investors and sold stock in the corporation. He struck a lease with Frank Horwith, who owns the former cement plant, that gives Atlas Grain 20 years in the location, access to a large truck scale and to a rail spur and Horwith's locomotive to shuttle between the storage bins and Conrail tracks nearby.

In June, workers descended into the bins, sandblasting, chipping and scraping the residue of 80 years of cement production from the walls. The Atlas Cement plant last operated in 1982, but it once supplied all of the cement used in the construction of the Panama Canal. There was plenty of history to chisel off the inner walls of the 100-foot-high bins.

Two of the bins are done, and Fink and his plant manager Dave Jackson expect to open next week

with an 80,000-bushel capacity.

When they finish their work, the corporation will be able to hold 1.5 million bushels of grain. It will be a government-approved warehouse, the only such facility within miles. Area farmers now must drive to other parts of Pennsylvania or into Maryland when they deliver grains for the federal government's commodity loans. Corn, wheat, oats and soybeans will be stored at Atlas Grain, according to Fink.

An official from the government's Commodity Credit Corp. is expected to make one last inspection once the final electrical hookups between conveyors, bins and augers have been made next week.

Atlas Grain Corp. will then open for business, just in time for the harvest of ear corn in the area.

Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Richard Grubb commended Fink during an opening ceremony for making the investment that could open new markets to grain farmers in east central Pennsylvania.

"All industries have cycles," said Grubb. "We are certainly at a low point in our cycle."

But shrewd investors know that the low points are the best time to invest, because inevitable upturns in the agricultural or industrial economies can, in hindsight, make the ventures successful, said Grubb.

Grubb said Fink's venture should send a signal to other investors not to write off Pennsylvania's largest industry. Farming, he said, will again enjoy good health.

Indeed, Atlas Grain Corp. has already drawn attention from a wide variety of sources. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service offices in Lehigh and Northampton counties, which dispatch loads of government-purchased grains, are well aware that the CCC is eyeing the new firm as a warehouse.

The USDA reimburses farmers part of the freight costs for hauling grain purchased by the CCC to distant warehouses. A local grain bin could save thousands of dollars in transportation costs annually.

Conrail has helped, putting Fink in touch with Keystone Food Products Inc. of Palmer Township, Northampton County, a snack food manufacturer and coordinating the rail shipment of a carload of food corn from Illinois for the company.

Greg Solt, Northampton County's agricultural extension

agent, has been participating in talks with two of his counterparts in New Jersey to see if Atlas Grain can act as a conduit for grain exports through the Salem, N.J. port.

Solt and extension agents Everett Chamberlain of Warren County, N.J. and David Lee of Salem County, N.J. have been courting potential buyers in Spain and in Egypt.

The agents feel grains from the two states could be shipped out of Salem's fledgling port, just off the Delaware Bay across from New Castle, Del.

Solt said the foreign purchasers were given a tour of the new grain

warehouse and of the port, and have returned to their countries to weigh their options.

He said cooperative extension workers must turn their focus to help operations like Atlas Grain.

"We've been teaching people to grow things for years," Solt said. "It's got to the point where we have to teach them how to sell."

According to Solt, the success of the Atlas Grain and Salem port experiment depends to a large extent on how inexpensively grains can be shipped from the Midwest, down the Mississippi, to Port New Orleans.

If Pennsylvania and New Jersey growers can get their grains to

Salem cheaper than those in the Midwest can get theirs to New Orleans, and can pass that savings abroad, they may find themselves at no loss for buyers.

Fink expects to spend about half his time running Atlas Grain, with Jackson in charge of the day-to-day operation. Sonia Fink, David's wife, serves as the secretary and treasurer of the corporation.

Fink admits he has had his nervous moments preparing for the Atlas Grain operation, but calms himself with the thought that he has more at stake financially in running his farm.

And he seems to have done a good job at that.

Van Buskirk Honored For Role In Avian Flu Outbreak

HARRISBURG — Dr. Max A. Van Buskirk, Jr., director of the Pennsylvania Agriculture Department's Bureau of Animal Industry, has received the 1986 Honor Award for Service from the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA).

Van Buskirk was an instrumental figure in the eradication of an avian influenza outbreak that threatened the poultry industries of Pennsylvania and the United States in 1983-84, and in preventing another such crisis in 1986.

He was nominated by Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Richard E. Grubb for his "contributions to the livestock industry of Pennsylvania, and in particular, the poultry industries of Pennsylvania and the United States."

An independent panel of judges selected Van Buskirk for the award, presented to him at a

ceremony Sept. 16 at the NASDA annual meeting in Chicago.

"His selection underscores the significance of the contributions he has made in preserving the well-being of Pennsylvania's \$2.3 billion livestock and poultry industries," Grubb commented.

As head of the Bureau of Animal Industry, Van Buskirk played a leading role in the state-federal task force that curtailed a severe outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Pennsylvania poultry in 1983-84. The epidemic cost the state's poultry industry more than \$100 million.

Van Buskirk subsequently established an avian influenza surveillance program that resulted in immediate detection of the virus when it emerged again in 1986. He directed a control program that limited its spread to 14 flocks and eradicated the disease from Pennsylvania poultry within two months.

His invitation to be a principal in the Second International Symposium on Avian Influenza, held recently in Athens, GA, is indicative of the high regard his leadership during the outbreaks has earned him.

Also during Van Buskirk's tenure as director, the Bureau eradicated bovine brucellosis in 1983 and bovine tuberculosis in 1984. It has conducted a pilot project with the U.S. Department of Agriculture since 1984 to eradicate pseudorabies, a viral disease in swine.

Van Buskirk attended Bucknell University and received his degree in veterinary medicine from the University of Pennsylvania in 1956.

He practiced veterinary medicine and owned and operated the Lewisburg Veterinary Hospital from 1968 until his appointment as head of the Bureau of Animal Industry in 1980.

HEWEY WELDING

Box 2312, Rd 4, Lebanon, PA 17042
717-867-5222

ALUMINUM GRAIN BODIES & ALUMINUM REPAIRS



These ultra-light bodies are designed for strength through engineering, not strength with bulk. For example a 16' grain body with tailgate and 48" sides weighs only 1490 lbs. complete. We'll build you any length or any side height up to 60".

Also available

- ★ Double swinging hay hauling tailgate
- ★ Diamond Flooring
- ★ Barn door type tailgate
- ★ Pull out panel tailgates
- ★ Slide out cattle chutes
- ★ Any size grain chute

ROOFS NEED PAINTING?

Let Seal Crete Make Those Roofs Shine!

"The Farm Painting Specialist" Since 1961



We Are The Fussy One's

"NO JOB WE CAN'T HANDLE"

We Have The Equipment To Do Your Job

FOR THE ROOFS OF:

**TOBACCO SHEDS • IMPLEMENT SHEDS
BARNs • CHICKEN HOUSES**

- Asphalt Coating • Colored Coating • Fibered Coating
- Waterproof Coating • Aluminum Coating

OUR SPECIALITIES ARE:

AGRICULTURE - COMMERCIAL - INDUSTRIAL - CHURCHES

- Barn Painting
- Milk House
- Roof Coating
- Water Proofing Silos
- Stucco Farmhouses

For FREE Estimate CALL



Seal Crete Inc.

PAINTING & WATERPROOFING
RD 2, Box 417, Ephrata, PA 17522 • 717-859-1127