

Retired County Agent Keeps Farm Show On His Agenda

BY SALLY BAIR

Lancaster Co. Correspondent

LANCASTER — Arnold Lueck will be attending his 40th Farm Show this year and can still say, "It's exciting to participate." For the last 25 years he has assumed duties for some of the exhibits as county agent from Lancaster County, and though he is working this year, he is no longer a member of the Penn State Cooperative Extension staff. Lueck retired December 31 from his work in Lancaster County, but is carrying out commitments made before his retirement.

He says, "It's only been about 20 years that I have actively participated in the crops area of the Farm Show. I usually attend association meetings that are held that week. The Farm Show is good public relations between farmers and the non-farming segments of society. It is where farmers and consumer meet."

Asked if he'll continue to go to the show when his job does not require it, he laughed and said, "Sure, I'll go." In fact, he recalls visiting the Farm Show from his home in State College when he had no compelling reason to go.

But he tries to learn from the many exhibits. Lueck says, "I look for trends, especially in the machinery exhibits and watch for things happening in the livestock world and with crops. I enjoy it each year."

Learning and educating have been an integral part of Lueck's career. Before joining the Penn State Extension Service, he taught vocational education for 10 years. But it is through the informal education of the Extension Service that his impact has been strongest.

He says candidly, "My only regret is not having gone directly into Extension. I made the change because I felt I could use my background, my training and experience to much better advantage with the University."

As Lueck reflects on his 25-year career in Lancaster County, he says, "This is an amazing county. You feel the challenge from the people themselves. They were well informed and willing to make changes where it will make their life easier. It was a big challenge to try to keep up with the needs of the people, and the needs kept changing."

He called this area a "very challenging area" to work in. "People here engage in an intensive type of agriculture and we get satisfying results from what we do."

Indeed, Lueck says that one of the reasons he has enjoyed living and working in this area is that, "We have the kind of people who are receptive and who welcome the kind of information Extension makes available. They respond affirmatively."

Throughout his reflections on the

work of a county agent in Lancaster County, Lueck makes it clear that part of the "charge" of an Extension agent is making information available to the public. He said local people will do something to help themselves once they receive the information and the ideas. "That is what Extension is all about."

One of the attractions of the job was the diversity of the people with whom he worked. Lueck admitted to having to be prepared on a wide variety of subjects, and needing the ability to "shift gears and get on with something else."

Whether it was agronomy or horticulture, beekeeping or nutgrowing, Lueck was involved and could be counted on for an answer.

Having grown up on a diverse small farm in Wisconsin, Lueck says he studied crops and horticulture because of "my interest in growing various crops." He recalls, "I had potatoes as a 4-H project. I may have had strawberries. I started two kinds of grapes at an early age — and they are still bearing."

Asked if his projects were blue ribbon winners, Lueck says there were no round-ups in those days as there are now. He said the county agent, who lived less than a mile from their home, came and evaluated the projects.

Lueck was born in Wisconsin of "half immigrant" parents. His mother was first generation American from parents who came from southcentral Germany, and Lueck's father came from a part of Germany that is now Poland. There were four brothers and two sisters, and Lueck was a twin. His twin was a dairy farmer in Wisconsin all his life. They grew up in what Lueck refers to as "the foreign cheese area" of Wisconsin, home to Swiss cheese, brick cheese and Limburger cheese.

He took a short course of the University of Wisconsin but felt he couldn't afford the full-time tuition. A professor, however, seeing the potential, gave him the \$27.50 to pay the tuition, and Lueck was off on the pursuit of an education.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Lueck got a job with the U.S. Regional Pasture Research Lab at Penn State because he says, "I had done considerable work in pasture investigations and grass breeding. I had a good background in what they were doing with forage crops." Friendships developed while living in State College made the transition to Extension a logical one for Lueck when he decided upon a career change.

In 25 years there have been some major changes in agriculture and in the role of an extension agent. Lueck says, "There is now an explosion of information available, including material from research



Lueck was especially adept at answering questions from homeowners about problems with their trees and shrubs. Here he looks over one of the holly trees on the patio of the Farm and Home Center.

stations and private research. Farming has gone from a way of life to being business oriented."

He said the use of computers will make widespread the availability of information. And, he added, "Farmers must be aware of the marketing of farm products. Marketing used to stop at the end of the lane, and now it is worldwide. There is competition with farmers in other continents."

Part of the competition comes from consumers, about whom Lueck says, "Consumers of today are much better educated and have much better knowledge. That puts the pressure on farmers to produce what the consumer wants."

Helping farmers evaluate all the information available was an integral part of Lueck's job. He notes, "We've been charged with providing impartial information. We counsel farmers on their choices."

Another big change in his job over the years was providing information to homeowners who became increasingly well informed. He said, "Homeowners are much more aware of the environment they can create for themselves around the home, and are much more interested in controlling pests, insects and weeds. They are much more quality conscious."

Today Extension workers are more dependent upon the mass media to get out timely information. Lueck recalled the early days when he would send newsletters weekly to fruit growers, advising them of the current pest for which to watch. Lueck's weekly columns in the daily papers were not only well read, but were also well headed. The timely information he provided was useful to farmers and homeowners alike.

Indeed, one of Lueck's pleasures over the years has been working in his own garden and caring for his own trees, shrubs and lawn. He admits that at least part of the reason for gardening is, "I like to practice what I preach. It gave me a picture of how the weather had been influencing the growing season, and what pests were current." In addition, he said that he likes to try new varieties in his garden each year.

Perhaps the biggest change he has witnessed over his 25-year career is that brought about by farmers adopting technology to production practices. He said one of the most significant changes due to technology has been the trend to high density populations of both livestock and crops.

Remembering his early years, Lueck said 12,000 to 15,000 plants per acre was the maximum. Today, 22,000 to 25,000 plants per acre is the norm. He adds, "That's

crops and animals has increased so much."

He has also seen tremendous strides made through the use of superior genetics and inheritance. "That means a bigger return for labor and management." He said he likes to repeat information used by Earl Butz who is of the same generation. In the 30's it required 30 minutes of labor to grow a bushel of corn. Today it takes less than one minute to grow that bushel of corn.

Farm mechanization has become commonplace, and Lueck says it means almost the elimination of the scoop shovel and the fork. "There's a lot of push button farming."

He notes, "Tremendous strides have been made in controlling crop and animal pests." Another area of change has been the "extensive use of agricultural chemicals in producing feed and food. The widespread use of these chemicals are tools for production for farmers."

So as he slowly closes down his office after 25 years of serving the public, Lueck says, "What I will probably miss most are the day to day contacts. In Extension every day is different. I often wondered what would happen next. I had a curiosity about each day, like a kid going to school. We are 100 percent people oriented and I will miss that."

He admitted that the most enjoyable part of his job was leaving the office and visiting one to one at a farm or home. "I'd much rather do that than office work." His Chrysler was a familiar sight both in the parking lot and throughout the county, and he put 290,000 miles on it in as he served Lancaster

countians.

Lueck said he really felt the caring and appreciation of the people with whom he has worked at the reception held in honor of his retirement several weeks ago. Over 200 countians turned out to say "thank you" to Lueck for his untiring devotion to furthering Lancaster County agriculture. The plaques, gifts and tributes will be packed away to be enjoyed in the moments of quiet which are yet to come.

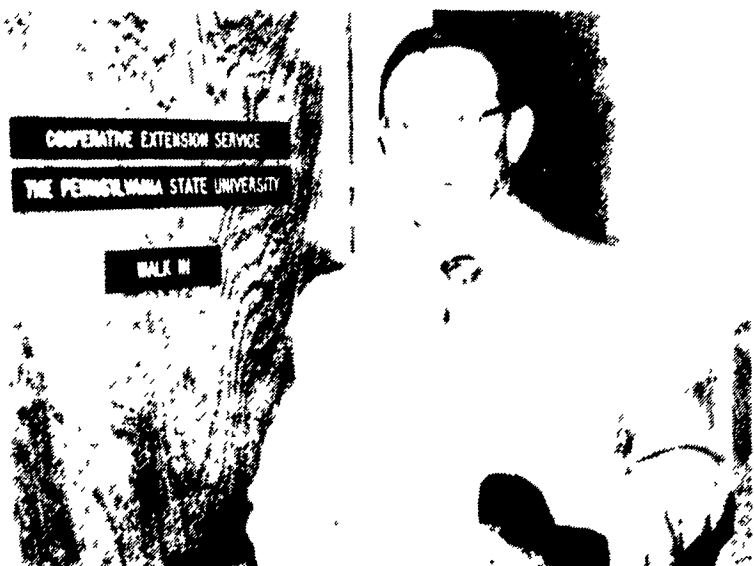
At that time he alluded to his desire to travel with his wife Pat to the west to see the "biggest plants of them all," the giant redwoods and sequoias. Now he adds that he will also look forward to visiting that famous San Joaquin Valley, that most fertile of all land in the country.

Furthermore he would like to travel to Europe and see the areas from which his ancestors came. But mostly, he says, he will spend his retirement "paying more attention to family members," visiting with some of the many people he has come to know over the years, and doing a lot of reading for pleasure. There are also four grown children to visit with and grandchildren to spend time with.

He promises too to maintain his interests in agricultural events, and it's certain that he will be seen at many events throughout the county and state. As he closes out his formal career in informal education, he leaves a legacy to those he has served — a more productive county, and thousands of people who have benefitted from his great knowledge and love of agriculture.



Arnold Lueck, retired Lancaster County extension agent, examines a sample of alfalfa hay for leafiness, color, moisture and aroma to determine its quality. Lueck will be at the 1987 Farm Show, working on the crops area, where he has been



The Lancaster County Extension office has been home for Lueck for 25 years. With his retirement on December 31, he will no longer be going to the office every day, but he will