

Farmers Survive Winter With Help From Relief Fund

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But farmers, not only in southern Pennsylvania but throughout the Southeast, will not likely forget the leanness, the sparse crops, brown and dead pasture, empty barns and silos, and hungry livestock that marked the Drought of 1986.

Nor is it likely, as they plant — and hope — that drought-stricken livestock producers will soon forget the outpouring of generosity that brightened for many a bleak winter of sparse feed supplies, added feed expense and heavily-crunched cash flow.

It was an effort of sharing that began with farmers loading up excess hay from their own mows and fields, and eventually spread to churches, community service groups, private businesses, 4-H and FFA's, ag-support groups, governmental agencies, even the National Guard.

In Pennsylvania, drought relief concern in late summer culminated in the establishment of a relief fund, co-ordinated primarily by Lancaster Farming and the Pennsylvania Farmers Association.

"It mostly started when people who had no hay to share wanted to donate money to the effort," according to Lois Brandt. Brandt is the office manager for PACMA, commodity marketing arm of PFA.

PACMA's livestock coordinator Ron Manley and Lancaster Farming editor Everett Newswanger agreed to work with the initial establishment of the fund for funneling donated monies to farmers in need of hay for livestock. Since Manley's job responsibilities keep him out of his Camp Hill office a great deal of the time, Brandt managed most of the actual records keeping and related chores entailed in administering the fund.

Response to the fund was overwhelming, eventually surpassing \$25,000, including \$8,500 donated by the Southern District of the Church of the Brethren.

Brandt is also an active worker for Pennsylvania's Southern District of the Church of the

Brethren. In an effort to get hay moved early in the program, she called Church World Service, headquartered at New Windsor, in search of a truck. That call got her a connection to Charlie Sellers.

Sellers, Southern District Disaster Coordinator for the Church of the Brethren, is accustomed to responding on short notice to organizing and assisting with various disaster emergencies. With unflagging enthusiasm, the Spring Grove retiree made hundreds of phone calls and spent countless hours in the actual arranging, loading, directing and helping to deliver thousands of bales of donated and purchased hay.

Sellers' right-hand man as hay deliveries continued through the winter was fellow church member Lester Ferrance. Warren Eshbach, district manager for Church of the Brethren, also played a major role in the hay relief efforts.

Initial efforts were directed at sending hay to parched farm communities in the South and Piedmont areas. Loads of hay went to Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. But, a large part of the hay relief focus soon turned to neighboring farmers in York County.

"When we realized how serious it was here, we decided to keep the assistance right here at home," relates Sellers.

Also called into a leadership role in the local hay relief effort was York County extension agent Tony Dobrosky. Through the extension service and local ag leaders, an application form was quickly put together. Farmers facing curtailed feed supplies were asked to fill out the forms, which indicated numbers of livestock and feed on hand.

"Tony worked very hard to be as fair as possible to every involved," says Airville dairymen Ellis Crowl.

Crowl, president of the York County Farmers Association, when the relief effort began, agreed to assist with the coordination of hay deliveries to the drought-stricken southern half of



Among the hundreds of loads of hay moved through relief efforts were nine donated from the Waynesboro orchards of the Lucabaugh family. Assisting with the loading were, from right, Jim Pentz, Stewart Lucabaugh, Lester Ferrance, Earl Krout, Nevin Lucabaugh, Glenn Miller and Steve Neeley.

the county. Like Brandt, Sellers, Dobrosky and many others involved, his commitment to help move hay to hungry livestock on full-time farming operations was one of many personal hours.

Four trainloads of hay came by railcar to Stewartstown, courtesy of vice-presidents and general managers A.P. Smith of the MA and PA Railroad, and George Hart of the Stewartstown Railroad. And, an Army National Guard convoy of donated hay arrived in the southern part of the county early in the relief efforts. Cooperating with efforts of the military assistance, and other relief arrangements, was Chuck Muir of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

Before the haylift effort ended just a few weeks ago, 85 truckloads of hay aided southern York County farmers. The total 726 tons, or 36,308 bales, helped feed cattle on 51 different farms. Of that, 48 were family dairy herds averaging 66 cows per herd, and three were beef herds, averaging 51 cows per herd.

Now, the Summer Drought Hay Relief fund is drained. But, in its wake are dairy cattle still in milking strings, when, without a timely delivery of hay, they might otherwise have simply been sold. Beef cows that might have gone to slaughter have delivered a new generation of calves.

And farmers, caught in cash deficit situations breathed a bit easier for a few weeks after a trailer unloaded a few hundred bales of hay. Some of the hay came free, donated or bought with fund dollars.

On many loads, farmers paid all or part of the transportation costs, with the fund also underwriting some delivery charges. According to Crowl, every load that came free of transportation charges was divided among several producers, as were loads of extra-high-quality hay.

Representative of the drought-stricken York County dairymen are Melvin and Barb Marks, and their daughters, Nicole, 3, and baby Erin, 1. The Marks family has been farming less than three years, and moved onto their present rented farm at Collinsville last November.

At harvest, Marks inventoried about half the feed he'd hoped to have on hand for the winter. He'd put every stalk of his 50 acres of corn, instead of the anticipated 20, into the silo. With no grain, Marks then switched to a complete feed for the cows, to save what ear corn he could for other feeding. Rye went on the 50 corn acres in the fall, toward anticipated feed shortages this spring. A major concern was running out of silage



"We are just so appreciative; it's hard to find the words to express it," say Melvin and Barb Marks, one of 51 southern York County farm families who stretched scarce winter feed with hay from the Drought Relief Fund. As their remaining supply of bales dwindles, Melvin, with Nicole, and Barb, holding Erin, look ahead to the spring rye ready for harvest.

before the rye was ready, with Marks keeping close watch on silo levels and allotting feeding volume.

Hay was in short supply, too. But, looking back, this young dairy producer relates that, every time he started to figure how he was going to wring a purchase of hay out of the cash flow, the phone would ring telling him that he was due in line for a load.

"It helped stretch about three months worth of hay through the winter," he says quietly. "We are just so appreciative that it's hard to find the words to express it."

Marks acknowledges that it is hard for a farmer to admit a problem, such as the feed shortage, even though the cause was through no fault of his own. And, too, he adds that there were times when, after hearing of farmers farther South with virtually no feed, they wondered if they should

keep the hay.

Due to continued "pencil pushing," frequent silage inventories, hay relief hay that helped feed young stock, and saving the very best alfalfa hay for the milking herd, Marks was able to maintain his herd production despite stretched feed supplies.

"There are still a lot of good things happening from people, lots of people with the right heart," says Crowl of the emotional boost that drought-stressed farmers found in the generous sharing efforts.

"To some people, it just meant so much; there was some livestock out there getting real hungry. For some, it was the only hay, the only feed, they had."

And drought-stricken farmers, from southern York County and unknown places across the Southeast, say "Thanks."



Ellis Crowl, past president of the York County Farmers Association, helped coordinate hay deliveries in the drought-wracked southern half of the county. With the relief efforts drawn to an end, corn planting offers renewed optimism for a year of more plentiful feeds harvest.

May 7, 1987

1986 Summer Drought Hay Fund

To Whom It May Concern

I have examined the accounting records and financial transactions of Everett Newswanger and Donald Russer coordinators and in cooperation with the Pa. Farmers Association for the 1986 Summer Drought Hay fund for the period of July 1986 thru May 1987.

I have found them satisfactory in the collection and disposition of funds for this beneficial service.

Respectfully Submitted

Donald S. Eby

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