

**OPINION**

**Farming Cycles; Clue To The Future?**

"Farming's financial well-being has depended on the weather, domestic supply and demand, and world economic conditions since before the Declaration of Independence," says historian Wayne Rasmussen. He recently retired from USDA's Economic Research Service.

Reporting in the Farm Credit System's financial management journal for farmers and ranchers called Farming Rasmussen says American agriculture has gone through a series of boom and bust cycles. Those may shed some light on the future of today's troubled farm sector.

A good place to start looking at the cycles is the Civil War, nearly 130 years ago.

Military demand during the Civil War created a strong domestic market for farm products. Then, the end of the war brought on an agrarian depression that lasted the rest of the century. Poor weather in the United States and economic depression in Europe, which had been a major export market, also contributed.

The turn of the century brought better times for farmers. The disappearance of the frontier slowed the amount of new land being put into farming.

Land values increased 118 percent between 1900 and 1920. Bad weather in Europe stepped up foreign buying and a flood of new U.S. immigrants meant that farmers had about a million new mouths to feed each year.

Even the discovery of gold in Alaska, which triggered a mild inflation, benefited U.S. farmers.

Demand from World War I put the finishing touches on a period of strong farm profits.

Farmers responded to the boom years in much the same way many of their grandsons and granddaughters responded to the bullish spirit of the 1970s, says Rasmussen. They borrowed heavily to expand their operations and land values soared.

In July of 1920, all that came to an end when prices collapsed because of falling exports. Wheat fell from \$2.16/bu. in 1919 to \$1.03 in 1921.

"Europe learned a lesson from the war and was determined to work toward agricultural self-sufficiency," says Rasmussen. "It never wanted to be so dependent on imports again and, consequently, U.S. exports fell."

Land values also dropped and this, coupled with a sudden tightening of credit, plunged farmers into serious financial problems.

"Although the farm depression

of the 1920s looks a lot like today's problems, I would urge caution in drawing any comparison," says Douglas Bowers, an ERS historian. "The farm problems of the 1920s were soon compounded by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Dust Bowl period, a combination of tragic events that hasn't been seen in this country since."

New Deal farm programs began to improve the rural economy in the latter half of the 1930s. But it wasn't until World War II that farmers, and the U.S. economy as a whole, fully recovered.

Between 1940 and 1945, war demand raised farm prices almost 90 percent. A bushel of wheat climbed to \$1.50 — up from 59 cents just before the war. Income per farm rose 92 percent in constant dollars.

Prosperity continued into the post-war era. But American farming was changing. During the war, tens of thousands of people left the countryside for jobs in the cities and never returned. New machinery and technology created a surge in farm productivity that surpassed anything experienced before.

Greater productivity created large surpluses, pushing down prices and income. Falling prices and the inability to buy into the new technology forced some less competitive farmers out of business.

In 1940, there were more than 6 million farms. By 1960, the number had fallen to below 4 million and the farm economy was at the bottom of another downward spiral that had begun after the Korean War.

"It wasn't until the late 1960s that we got rid of the price-depressing surpluses," says Rasmussen. "India had several years of drought and bought heavily from us. Also, the Soviet Union was making big purchases indirectly through other countries. Then, in 1972, the Soviets started making direct purchases and world demand for U.S. farm products really took off."

The buoyant 1970s were followed by the bitter reversals of the 1980s. That's a pattern that hasn't been uncommon in history. What happens from here?

"In a sense, you can say it has to get better," says Rasmussen. "History shows us that agricultural problems are cyclical and all cycles come to an end eventually."

"The trouble is," he says, "is that history doesn't enable us to predict when the current one will end. You can't say we have 10 years left on this one just because the depressed farm cycle of the 1920s and 1930s



**NOW IS THE TIME**

By Jay Irwin

Lancaster County Agriculture Agent

**To Check Ventilation System During Hot Weather**

Ventilation is most important during hot and humid weather. During hot weather our broiler and layer houses need more air movement inside the house. I would suggest placing circulating fans inside the house to move more air across the birds. This will definitely give relief. In weather reports it's known as the "chill" factor. If you move air at the rate of 500 c.f.m. across the birds, it will reduce the temperature-to-the bird by 10 degrees.

I know if the temperature is 95 degrees outside it will not be any cooler than 95 degrees inside, but the chill factor would make it feel like 85 degrees to the bird.

Another very important factor during hot weather is to ventilate the attic. The best way is to have an inlet at one end and an exhaust fan at the other end. If you don't move the air out of the attic, the temperature can rise to over 150 degrees. This trapped hot air will eventually work down through the insulation and into the house.

**To Check Alfalfa For Leafhoppers**

We've seen a big increase in the

number of leafhoppers and aphids on our alfalfa this year. Much of the second crop is showing heavy damage. It appears yellow at a distance but up close, heavy leaf damage is evident. At this stage of maturity, it's best to cut it. Then spray the stubble to protect the third cutting. The Agronomy Guide lists a number of materials that are effective, including Guthion, Carbaryl, Furidan, Malathion and Methoxychlor. Cygon is effective on a week to ten days regrowth. Always follow label directions.

**To Use Pesticides Safely**

If you ever spill a pesticide on your skin, wash it off immediately. Research by a dermatologist shows that washing is most effective within one minute of exposure and less effective half an hour after exposure. This indicates the urgent need for immediate attention following the skin exposure to pesticides.

The research also shows that the amount of absorption of pesticides through the skin varies with the location on the body. The forehead absorbs seven times as much pesticide as the forearm. And the scalp absorbs four times as much as the forearm and palm. The three areas

of the entry of pesticides into your body are through the mouth, nose and skin.

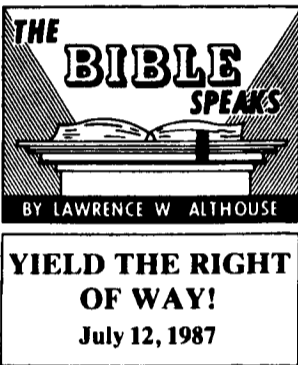
It is very important that protective covering be worn by anyone that mixes and applies pesticides. Face masks and protective covering are available through many farm supply stores.

**To Keep Dogs Under Control**

The summer months increase outdoor activity with your dog. Keep in mind that a dog owner's responsibility is to keep his pet under control at all times. Roaming dogs cause accidents, bite, damage property and can be a general nuisance. They also carry disease from farm to farm. Dogs are personal property and the owners are responsible for any damage caused by their pets.

Many dog related problems would be alleviated if owners were more aware of their responsibilities. All pet owners really need to do is to have their dogs licensed, inoculated for rabies and keep them under control. Remember, all dogs six months of age or older must be licensed. A license is an inexpensive means to identify your dog if it should stray. It also shows you care for your pet.

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Background Scripture: Romans 5:12 through 6-23. Devotional Reading: Romans 6:20-23.

If you drive a car, there have been countless times when you've seen those signs that command you to "YIELD." What it means, of course, is that two rights of way are converging and, if a collision is to be avoided, one of those rights of way must yield or give way to the passage of the other. It doesn't mean that you must necessarily stop, but that you give precedence to someone else. We may not like doing this, but we've all learned a long time ago that it is the only way to avoid a collision. There are times when, for our own safety, we must give way.

So it is in the larger view of life, too. There are times when our lives are on a collision course and we must yield to a higher power and good than ourselves. My desire for power and success, must yield to God's will for righteousness. My longing for security may have to be yielded to God's call to take up a cross. My compulsion to hide my sins from scrutiny may need to give way to God's call to repentance. Thus, Paul warns us, "Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but

yield yourselves to God..." (Romans 6:13).

**OUR CHOICE**

What does it mean to "yield"? When we're driving our car, it means that we give the right of way to someone else. In the J.B. Phillips translation, we are admonished not to "hand over your bodily parts to be, as it were, weapons of evil for the devil's purposes." The New English Bible uses a similar terminology, "put yourselves at the disposal of God." The Jerusalem Bible renders this as: "you should, instead, offer yourselves to God."

Each of these translations of this passage use different language, but the meaning is the same: serve God and him alone. It is acknowledged that we are constantly confronted with the choice of serving God or serving evil. In Romans, Paul makes it clear that none of us are compelled to serve either God or the devil. The responsibility is ours; we can choose to be subject to the will of God or the forces of evil. We will serve one or the other and the choice is ours.

To be sure, few of us knowingly make a commitment to let evil dominate us. Even people whose lives are clearly in the grip of evil often do not realize the extent to which they are slaves to sin. We all make choices, however, and those choices, small and inconsequential as they may seem, may lead us deeper and deeper into the grip of evil. Thinking that we are in control of our own lives, we fail to realize that our daily choices have put us squarely into the power of evil.

**SERVANTS OF GOD**

So it is not a question of whether we will be servants or not. The only question is whom we will serve. In the RSV, Paul calls us "slaves of God" in contrast to being "slaves of sin." But the New English Bible, I think, is closer to Paul's meaning when it speaks of being "bound to the service of God." It is not that our freedom to choose has been taken away from us, but that we have given it over into God's hands. It is the difference between bound and binding ourselves — the difference between the slave who is compelled and the servant who yields to the will of another.

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**Farm Calendar**

Saturday, July 11

Berks County Cattleman's Field Day, Devereaux-Solid, New Bolton Center, Genetics Unlimited.

Pa. Ayrshire Association Field Day, Harold Kulp, Pottstown. Annual Picnic, Pa. Nut Growers Association, Raymond Curanzy Farm, Annville.

Milking Shorthorn Society Field Day, Three Springs Farm, Newville.

Sunday, July 12

Youth Institute, Pa. Association of Farmer Cooperatives, Juniata College; continues through July 15.

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lasted about 15 years."

Some economists are suggesting that we've already bottomed out and are starting on a gradual upswing now, he notes.

"There is nothing in history to disprove that," Rasmussen adds. "The fact is we won't really know the duration of this down cycle until it, too, becomes part of our past."

