



OPINION

Taking The Pulse Of Agriculture

Larry Beard of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service calls it, "Taking the pulse of agriculture."

Like a regular physical examination by a doctor, he says, it's something that needs to be done, regardless of the apparent condition of the agricultural sector.

He is talking about the annual Farm Costs and Returns Survey, which is conducted by the statistics service and its state offices.

Jim Johnson and Mitch Morehart, two USDA economists who analyze the survey results, explain the need for the survey by referring back to the time before the first one was taken for 1984.

There were many questions then about what was happening in agriculture--and within different subsectors of farming--from lawmakers, farm organizations, extension and university people, and the public. The data to answer those questions just wasn't available.

What difference does the survey make?

"It's the difference between everybody speculating and arguing about what's going on in agriculture, versus everyone having a detailed set of reliable data collected from farmers themselves," says Morehart. "The data may not tell us the best direction to go. That's still a political matter. But good, hard information helps us separate fact from fiction and may prevent some serious mistakes from being made." Next February and March, interviewers will be back out in the field asking about 25,000 farmers and ranchers to participate in the fourth annual Farm Costs and Returns Survey. This one will collect data covering 1987.

Analysts and enumerators (as the interviewers are called) have already talked to a small sample of producers, testing the survey to make sure the questions are clear and can be easily answered from the records most farmers keep. Morehart was one of those conducting the tests. "Yes, this survey tries to get everything," he says, "but I found that farmers generally aren't reluctant to provide the information."

Morehart and Beard have a simple message for farmers: "We ask these questions because the information is needed. We depend on your cooperation."

Here are some of the facts they want farmers to know about the survey:

- It's a detailed survey, requiring at least an hour to conduct. The

enumerators are instructed to set up a time convenient for you, so they don't interrupt your work.

- The survey is voluntary. You are not required to participate, but your participation is critical. Each participant was selected by a statistical sampling procedure to represent many other farmers with similar operations. No one else can take your place.

- The enumerators were hired and trained to conduct the survey by your state agricultural statistics service. They live and work in your local area.

- Your answers are completely confidential. Your state office will feed the data into a computer, and will then destroy the original questionnaires so that no one can trace any answers back to you or your operation.

- If you're a participant in the survey, your state office will automatically send you a summary of the results. Other information will be released by USDA in various reports as results are compiled. This information is available directly from USDA and is also reported by many farm newspapers and magazines.

- The information serves many needs. The survey provides cost of production data which help policymakers understand the costs of farming. Other data help researchers track how inputs are being used and analyze the financial situation in the farm sector, how it's changing, and where problems are located. The survey also provides information helping lenders evaluate their credit policies and helping farmers understand what's happening within their region and their subsector of agriculture.

"Our job as USDA analysts is to be objective and to derive conclusions that are supported by the data," says Morehart. Researchers in government and universities, extension people, lawmakers, and analysts for farm organizations then find that disagreements over facts are fewer, and policy debates can concentrate on what needs to be done."

He concludes: "The data are going to tell the same story no matter who does the analysis, but different groups may be interested in different parts of that story."



NOW IS THE TIME

By Jay Irwin
Lancaster County Agriculture Agent

To Appreciate Harvest Completion
Once again we have come to the end of another growing season and the end of the harvest.

The 1987 year was a mixed year, with some areas having a favorable year while other areas suffered from lack of rainfall and excessive heat. In some neighboring counties it was much drier than Lancaster County.

Farm Calendar

Saturday, November 21
Montgomery Co. DHIA Banquet, 4-H center, Creamery, 7:15 p.m.

York Co. 4-H Dairy Achievement Banquet, Airville Fire Hall, 7 p.m.

Lancaster Farmers' Association Farm Tour, 21 thru 22

Monday, November 23
Sectional Stockholders Meeting, Farm Credit, Oxford Firehall, 7 p.m.

District 4-H Horse Meeting, Bedford, 7:30 p.m.

Lebanon Co. 4-H Dairy Banquet Ono Firehall, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 24
Farm Credit Sectional Stockholders Meeting, Christopher Dock High School, Kulpsville, 7 p.m.

PA Annual Forage Conference, Mercersburg Academy, 9 a.m.
Jefferson Co. Holstein Meeting, Country Hearth Restaurant, Brookville, 7:30 p.m.

Dairy Nutrition School/Manheim-Mt. Joy Area, Sponsored by Lanc. Co. Ext. Service, Country Table, Rt. 230 Mt. Joy, 9:30 a.m.

Lebanon Co. DHIA Meeting Prescott Fire Hall, 7 p.m.

Del. Alfalfa Management Meeting, State Fairgrounds, Harrington.

Forage Conference, Franklin County, 9 a.m.

Ag Commodity Forecasting, Bradford Extension Office, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 25
Dairy Nutrition School, Berks Co. Ag Center, Leesport, 9 a.m.

Friday, November 27
4-H County Council at Extension Office, Bradford Co., 7 p.m.

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The harvest is now 95 percent plus completed. There now comes a good feeling of satisfaction when we've done our best and all is safely gathered in.

Rewards from crop production come as a result of a choice selection of seeds and plants; of careful preparation of the seedbed; of applying soil nutrients, tilling the soil and weed control; of cooperation from weather's rain or sunshine and of the owner of manager inputs. Harvest time follows. A time of joy and thanksgiving should now prevail.

To Consider Attending No-Till Conference

"No-Tillage: Making It Profitable," is the theme of the 1987 Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference scheduled for Wednesday, December 16 at the Maryland State Fairgrounds, Timonium, Maryland.

The program committee has arranged for prominent speakers to cover such timely topics as: Cut No-Till Production Costs With Fall-Seeded Annual Legumes; Residue and Tillage Programs For Reduced Tillage Crops; Grain Marketing - Beyond The Elusive Dream; Weed Control Strategies in No-Till Soybeans; Marketing Perspectives For Alternative Crops and Optimizing Equipment Costs with No-Till. The keynote speaker is Alan R. Tank, Assistant Vice-President of the National Corn Growers Association. He is responsible for helping to formulate policies affecting the nation's corn industry.

There are a great many commercial exhibitors with representatives eager to greet and help you. The program starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m.

Program details are now avail-

able from County Extension Offices.

To Be Careful Around Flowing Grain

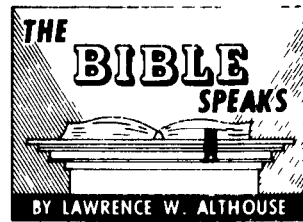
Many farms move grain from one bin to another, onto trucks or the feed grinder. One of the major hazards of moving stored grain is to become covered up and smothered by it. It is very dangerous to be standing in a grain bin when it begins to flow. It takes only a few seconds for an unloading auger to remove enough grain for a person to start sinking into the grain. Never enter a grain bin without first "locking out" all the power sources; also, never enter the bin alone without another person being present. Children should be warned about entering grain bins because of the danger of "bridging" of the grain or the shifting of large areas. All employees should be alerted to the hazards of flowing grain.

To Check Standby Generators

Your standby generator may be needed at any time. Is it ready? With all the uses of electricity on the farm today, we need this type of emergency equipment. We are in the weather season now when we can expect both snow and ice storms that can give us power outages. This means that activities on many farms will stop when the electricity fails. To have a standby generator is very good management; however, you need to run this generator at least once every two weeks to be sure it is in good running order when needed.

This kind of emergency equipment can be a life saver for both animal and poultry, as well as eliminate possible financial losses.

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GOING WITH THE FLOW
November 22, 1987

Background Scripture: Genesis 41:38-44, 4-52.

Dr. Joan Boysenko, in her book, *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* (Addison Wesley, 1987), tells of watching two children play on the seashore. A little boy, about four, was building a sand castle. As the tide moved in, however, he became frustrated in trying to maintain his creation against the relentless force of the tide. Frantically, he struggled, but it was hopeless.

Nearby was a little girl of about the same age. She too was building a sand castle, but she soon realized the inevitability of the tide and, instead of becoming frustrated, began a new game of digging holes and watching the tide fill them. Dr. Boysenko concludes: "The first

child ended up angry and frustrated -- his castle had been destroyed in spite of every effort to control the tides. The second child had instead discovered a new game and spent a doubly pleasant afternoon. She had both literally and figuratively learned to let go -- "to go with the flow."

JUSTIFIABLY BITTER

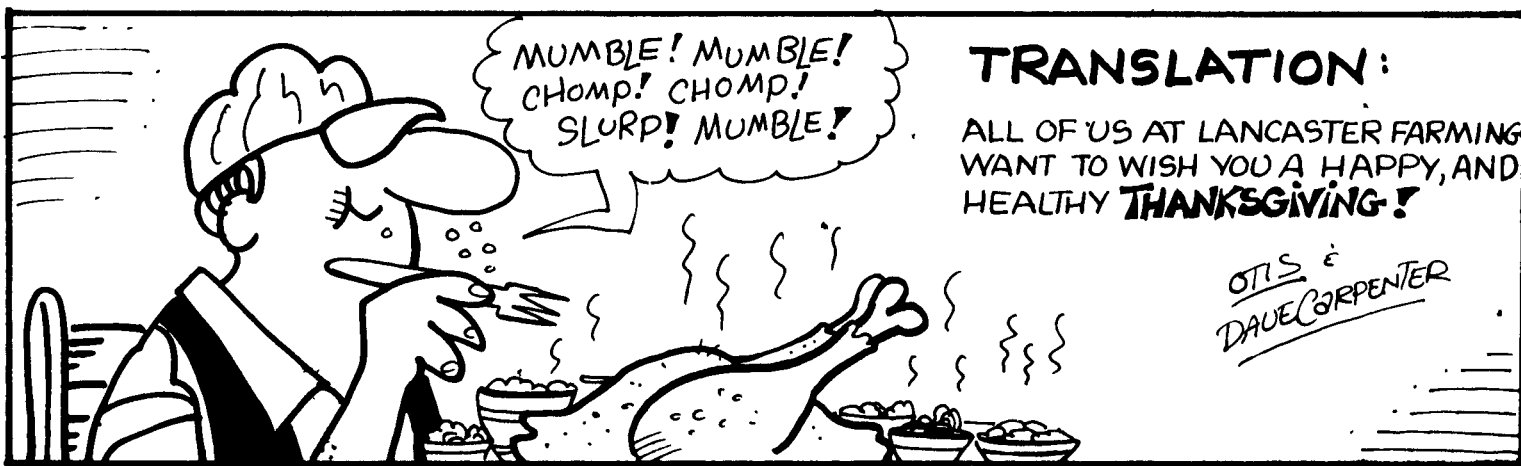
The little girl has learned as a child what Joseph learned as a young man. In light of everything that had happened to him, he would have been justified in staying bitter for the rest of his life. Sold into slavery by his own brothers, unjustly accused by Potiphar's wife, thrown into a dungeon in a strange, alien land, who could have blamed him if he had spent the rest of his cynical life of both man and God? Someone else might have said, "Let Egypt starve to death -- serves them right!"

Joseph could have chosen that course, but he didn't. There was nothing he could do to change what evil had befallen him at the hands of others, so he chose to make the best of the situation in which he found himself. Thus, instead of being closed to God's guidance, he was ready to follow wherever he might lead.

SPECIAL NAMES

We can detect his attitude in the names he gave his two children: MANASSEH, meaning "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house," and EPHRAIM, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (41:51,52). Joseph would have been justified in eating the fruits of bitterness for the rest of his life. Instead, he responded to the voice of God, letting go of the past and making the most of the present.

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TRANSLATION:
ALL OF US AT LANCASTER FARMING WANT TO WISH YOU A HAPPY, AND HEALTHY THANKSGIVING!

OTIS & DAVE CARPENTER