



With These Participating Professors

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Penn State  
FARM AND DAIRY  
Business Seminar of the Week

**JIM PEASE**  
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In previous columns, I've examined the possible uses of a farm business micro-computer and suggested some ways in which you can identify your information needs before you make the (sometimes) scary decision of buying a computer. If you have decided to seriously investigate the possibility of buying a computer, then read on. But don't get too anxious about making a decision this very day. You should carefully evaluate the software and hardware alternatives available before making a purchase. Careful planning and evaluation may save you from having an expensive paperweight in your office. A reasonable time frame for making the decision (from search to purchase) would be approximately 6 months. On the other hand, don't put off a decision because the microcomputer world is changing so much. I've known people to put off a purchase

decision year after year, claiming that they are waiting for the 'next big wave' of computer technology at cheaper prices. Those folks don't seem to think about the profit opportunities they're missing by not having a computer now.

**Microcomputer Software**  
'Software' indicates the computer programs or set of instructions that run the hardware (equipment), ask for the data input and print the reports you want to use. The most critical activity you can accomplish in purchasing a computer system is the evaluation and selection of software which accomplishes the information functions you want. This brings me to Pease's First Computer Commandment:

**Choose the hardware which runs the software you want**  
That is, find the software which provides you with the information you need in the time frame and presentation format you require. Then choose microcomputer hardware which will run that software. Don't be paralyzed (and likely swindled) by purchasing a particular brand of microcomputer without determining that software

exists which will be the real source of profit which pays for the computer system. My rule of thumb is to spend at least 3/4 of your search time on finding the best software. So if you spend 6 months evaluating computer hardware and software, at least 4 1/2 months of that should be spent in looking at software.

**Information Sources**

How to find the software which can accomplish what you want? There are several sources of information which might be available to you. Probably the best source of information about software is the experience of other managers. You may know some friends who are using computers on their farms. Those folks may have the most unbiased view available of the usefulness of computers for practical decision making. If they think computerization has been a success, make sure you understand what changes have been made possible through computer use and what part of their enthusiasm is 'computer infatuation'. If they think it's been a failure, try to determine whether the problem has really been the computer, or whether the failure is mostly their own fault.

Computer user groups can also be a source of information about software. Most commonly, these groups are composed of personal computer users, not business users. Often these users are interested in showing off their own skills. The Game Player and the Power Programmer are two such birds that inhabit the roost. However, occasionally there are business users and farm business users who can

provide valuable information and demonstrations of software. Local computer dealers sometimes provide good information about software, but you should always remember that they want to sell you a product. Most of these folks are genuinely helpful and honest, but every once in a while you'll find a reject used car salesman selling computers. Software information is also available through some county and state Cooperative Extension Service employees. They have experience with some computer programs, and don't have any particular axe to grind. Yet another source of good information are the various publications produced by Doane's Information Services (11701 Borman Drive, St.

Louis, MO 63146). The past few years have seen the demise of most agricultural computing newsletters and magazines, and Doane's Agricultural Computing newsletter (\$72/year, 12 issues) is the best available source of background information, descriptions and reviews of computer hardware and software, and tips for avoiding common pitfalls. Doane's Agricultural Computing Source Book is a collection of some of the best articles from the newsletter over the past few years, and it provides very good information on setting up your farm computer system. No farmer who is serious about purchasing computer software should be without Doane's Agricultural Software Directory.

**Gypsy Moth Spraying**

DOVER, DE — The Department of Agriculture's 1988 Gypsy Moth Suppression Project will begin on or about April 25, according to program manager Linda T. Bradley.

"The exact date will depend on weather conditions, leaf development and caterpillar hatch," Bradley explained.

Aerial applicators will begin spraying woodlots in Sussex County and southern Kent County and work their way north. The entire project is expected to last seven to 10 days.

Small airplanes and helicopters will apply Dimilin to inland wooded areas first. Dimilin (diflubenzuron) is an insect growth regulator that prevents the formation of new skin during the cater-

pillar's molting process. Planes and helicopters then will apply B.t. (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) to wetland areas and residential developments targeted for spraying in New Castle County around May 1. B.t. is a biological insecticide which controls caterpillars by interfering with their feeding process.

Both insecticides are registered with the EPA and are not harmful to people or animals. However, it is advised that residents remain indoors while spraying is under way.

Spraying will begin at dawn and continue as long as weather conditions are favorable, Bradley explained. Some spraying may take place in the afternoon if necessary.

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