

Land Prices Major Block For MD Farmers To Compete

How well do Maryland farmers compete with their counterparts throughout the United States? Quite well, according to a study conducted by Dr. Bruce L. Gardner, professor of agricultural and resource economics at the University of Maryland.

The study shows that, despite the inroads made by urban growth, Maryland farmers today account for a larger share of total U.S. farm income than their fathers did in 1950.

Dr. Gardner presented results of his study at a morning workshop as the first-ever Governor's Conference on the Future of Maryland Agriculture got underway Thursday (Nov. 10) for a two-day run at the Omni Hotel in Baltimore.

Gardner noted that the downward trend in farm numbers has been less severe in Maryland than in the nation as a whole, and the state now claims a larger fraction

of U.S. farms than at any time since World War II.

Surprisingly, farm labor wages in Maryland have not risen faster during the past 35 years than in other parts of the country.

But booming land prices are the major economic factor making it difficult for Maryland farmers to compete with their counterparts in other regions of the United States.

In 1950, Maryland farmland sold for a little more than twice the U.S. average price per acre. But Maryland farmland is now valued at more than three times the national average. The sharp decline in farmland prices elsewhere -- including the Midwest -- during the early 1980s was hardly noticed on the Maryland farm real estate scene.

High land prices mean high costs for producing many kinds of agricultural products. But certain kinds of goods and services can

still be produced if there is a strong local demand, even though they are costly to transport.

Included in this category are golf courses, recreational horse and hunting operations, landscaping, and nursery and greenhouse products.

High land prices and a virtual halt in the upward trend of crop yields seem to have placed Maryland grain farmers at a compara-

tive disadvantage with their Midwest counterparts. But the continuing importance of livestock -- especially dairy cattle -- and the broiler industry have kept Maryland corn prices at approximately an eight-cent premium over U.S. average prices for the past 35 years.

Intensive crop production, with its attendant heavy use of fertilizers and pesticides, does exact a

cost in environmental issues such as reduced water quality in groundwater, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.

But farmers in Iowa-- and probably other Midwest states-- are facing even more severe problems, as far as groundwater is concerned. So, on a relative scale, the environmental arena appears to give Maryland farmers a slight comparative advantage.

Agway Elects New Officers

SYRACUSE, NY — Ralph H. Heffner of Pine Grove, PA, and Richard C. Call of Batavia, NY, have been re-elected chairman and vice chairman, respectively, of the Agway board of directors. They were named at a board meeting immediately following the close of the Agway 24th Annual Meeting, October 28, in Syracuse.

William A. Hiller of Fayetteville, NY, was re-elected president and general manager of the 102,000-member farm cooperative, headquartered in DeWitt, NY.

Heffner, who operates a dairy and fruit farm, was first elected to the Agway board in 1973 and became chairman in 1987. He is a

graduate of The Pennsylvania State University and earned a master's degree in agricultural economics from the University of Delaware.

Call was elected to the Agway board in 1973 and vice chairman in 1987. He is a graduate of Cornell University and operates a large farm in partnership with his brother, raising processing vegetables and small grains.

Hiller earned a master's degree from The Pennsylvania State University. He has served as president, chief executive officer, and general manager of the farm cooperative since 1981.

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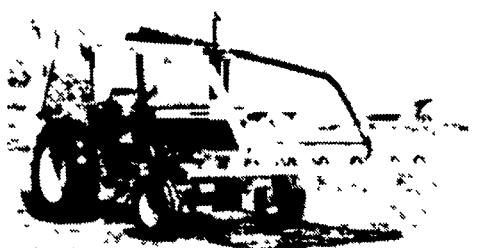
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