

Weather Man Doesn't Like Weather's Behavior

by **Bonnie Brechbill**
Franklin Co. Correspondent
CHAMBERSBURG — "Statistically speaking, two droughts do not often occur back to back," local meteorologist Robert Sellers told members of the Franklin County Crop Management Association. "But I don't like the way the weather is behaving right now," he added. "There's very little moisture."

Sellers spoke to the farmers at an educational meeting held at the Franklin County Extension Office February 9. Sellers, who has been observing the weather since 1933, gives daily forecasts on a local radio station. He uses regional forecasts, such as those emanating from Baltimore and Harrisburg, and tailors them to the local area using his past experience.

He defined weather as the

movement and behavior of the layer of air that blankets the earth. Weather occurs in the lower layers of the atmosphere.

In explaining last summer's heat, Sellers said that a big high pressure ridge built up in the upper atmosphere over the center of the United States. "It just sat there and warmed up," he said. "Dry, clear air heats up."

An unusual pattern in the jet stream is causing the current out-of-the-ordinary winter weather, Sellers said. The jet stream was discovered and named during World War II. With the invention of the jet airplane, bombers could make higher and faster bombing runs over Okinawa and Japan. Pilots on those runs discovered a stream of air moving at 50-75 miles an hour high over the earth. The movement of the jet stream

is caused by the unequal heating of the earth's surface by the sun. Our weather depends on the location of the jet stream.

"The jet stream snakes around the Northern and Southern Hemispheres," Sellers said. "This year, we have a subtropical jet stream. It's giving southern 'Florida the warmest winter weather they've had in a long time."

"Here, our heavy rains and snows--called northeasterners--come up from the Gulf of Mexico. This winter, our weather is coming from the West Coast and Canada. The moisture is being precipitated out over the Rocky Mountains." There is a chance for some precipitation on the air flow from Canada, which picks up moisture over the Great Lakes.

"The way the jet stream is moving now, it is not favorable for heavy precipitation in the Middle

Atlantic states, and the 90-day forecast calls for this to persist. It looks like a dry spring unless the air flow changes," Sellers said. He acknowledged, however, that the rate of accuracy on long range forecasts is not high. "Meteorology is not an exact science," he said.

"There's different winter weather in western Pennsylvania than on this side of the mountain," Sellers added. "They get heavy snow squalls. Our mountains, which run northeast to southwest, definitely affect our local weather."

"People say that the weather is different now than when they were kids," said Sellers. "It seems that way because we don't live long enough to see the whole cycle."

In looking over temperature records from the 1800s to the present, Sellers noted that the warmest periods were in the 1930s, and the coldest winters occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1961, 75 inches of snow fell locally. "Over the past few years, the average temperature for the United States overall has been down a little," he said.

Sellers is not a firm believer in the greenhouse effect. "I haven't seen evidence that it has taken effect yet," he said. "I have to be hown."

In response to a question from the audience, Sellers discussed cloud seeding, which has been a controversial local issue in recent years.

In the years 1960-1966, Chambersburg was in a dry, north-west air flow pattern and was 40 inches short of rain in the six-year period. Cloud seeding was used at that time to enhance nature's process. "When clouds were favorable for a thunderstorm, they were seeded with silver iodide to try to squeeze more moisture out of them," Sellers said.

He also said that during that dry period, orchardists used cloud seeding to keep clouds from building up hail.

"You can't stop a thunderstorm. There's so much energy there--such tremendous updrafts and downdrafts," he said.

Sellers concluded by saying that he thinks there are two things man will never be able to do--predict the weather with 100 percent accuracy, and control the weather.

Franklin County Conservation District Elects Officers

CHAMBERSBURG (Franklin) — Andrew Fitz of Waynesboro was re-elected chairman of the Franklin County Conservation District Board of Directors at their recent reorganization meeting.

Charles Myers of Chambersburg was elected vice chairman

while Donna Hays of Spring Run was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Richard Stoner of Greencastle was appointed to serve a four-year term as a director with the Franklin County Conservation District.

Two landowners were approved for conservation planning assistance. They are Michael Black

and Garry Quell, both located in Hamilton Township.

John Akers, district conservationist for the USDA Soil Conservation Service, gave a report of his office's activities for the month.

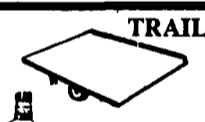
The directors present included Andrew Fitz, Glenn Dice, Wilbur Kline, Galen May, Charles Myers, and Richard Stoner.


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