

# Living Longer, Enjoying It Less

BY JOYCE BUPP

York Co. Correspondent

COLUMBIA, Md.— Americans are living longer, but may be enjoying it less, claims public health specialist Dr. Katherine Armstrong. And, the cost is exploding.

One billion dollars is spent every day, says Dr. Armstrong, in caring for those suffering from the major lifestyle-related health problems -- cancer, heart problems, diabetes, accidents and violence.

Dr. Armstrong is the coordinator of children and school programs in the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, a part of the national Department of Health and Human Services. She was featured speaker at the February 7 annual breakfast meeting of the Upper Chesapeake Bay Division of the Dairy and Food Nutrition Council of the Southeast, held at the Columbia Inn.

The Office of Disease Prevention was established in response to the medical field's call for a public health effort to focus on preventing rather than treatment of lifestyle-related illnesses.

Initial tactics to improve America's collective health were

aimed at meeting 226 objectives in three categories by 1990. Those areas were better prevention through screening of potential problems in doctors' offices, health protection from environmental and safety hazards, and the promotion of healthier habits.

While all objectives have not been met, Dr. Armstrong noted that death from strokes has decreased by 55 percent and from heart problems by 45 percent. Only 28 percent of the population smoke, compared to 46 percent a decade ago, and alcohol consumption is decreasing.

Greater awareness of vehicular seat belt use and safety caps on medicines are also among the accomplishments of the nation's health objectives.

"We've increased the guilt level considerably in this country," chuckled Dr. Armstrong, who liberally sprinkled humor through her serious health message. "At no age is it too late to change your habits to improve your lifestyle."

National Health Objectives for the year 2000 focus heavily on improving habits. Top priorities are to reduce tobacco, alcohol and other drug use.

While nutrition gets third prior-

ity ranking, no specific foods are singled out. The blood cholesterol issue, in fact, which in the past has focused on specific foods, mostly animal-sourced, has been slotted to the 16th place in a list of 21 objectives.

"Mental health is getting increasing attention as a priority," noted the public health specialist. Improving mental health and preventing mental illness is ranked fifth, just behind the fourth priority of increased physical fitness.

Although progress is seen in some health areas, others lag seriously. Children and adolescents are "worse off than in the '60's," according to Dr. Armstrong, especially in the "preventables" -- alcohol and drug use, suicides and homicides.

Ethnic groups, specifically Blacks, Hispanics and Indians, suffer with a death rate between two and three times that of other groups. And, males continue to die at a rate iniquitously above females.

"We have lacked a national commitment in the past toward health improvements," concluded Dr. Armstrong.

Carolyn Thompson, nutrition education director of the Upper Chesapeake Bay Dairy and Food Nutrition Council, was honored at the meeting for ten years of service. Jesse Bural, president of the Dairy Council, made the presenta-

tion.

About 100 Baltimore area nutrition and health professionals attended the annual breakfast. The

Upper Chesapeake Bay Dairy and Food Nutrition Council is fully funded by the Middle Atlantic Division, Dairymen, Inc.

## York Woman

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had to survey were extremely helpful."

Because of the periodic nature of the surveys, Phyllis spends many hours on the job some weeks, and none on other weeks. She has learned the times of the year that most of the surveys are done, and plans her personal and home schedule accordingly.

"I really do enjoy doing it," Phyllis says of her job gathering data on the nation's agriculture conditions. "There's flexibility in the work schedule. The times when I'm working on surveys are not usually when the farm is the busiest."

Rarely, though, does she do any interviewing early on a Monday morning. A major part of the Gross' family operation is finishing beef cattle, and Monday morning is loading time for the weekly stockyard trip.

Phyllis was "hired" as an assistant in loading cattle one September when the youngsters returned to school. When she asked their youngest, Daniel, what she would need to know about loading cattle, he passed on the advice Grandpa Harold had ingrained on his memory: "Keep your mouth shut and don't play with your stick." When you play with the stick, explains Phyllis, you're not paying attention to what you're supposed to be doing.

Cattle of all sizes can be handled through several diverse feeding facilities at Cold Springs, with some 500 finished yearly. A smaller sideline of farrow-to-finish hogs meshes well with the feedlot, and the approximately 800 acres cropped primarily to corn and wheat, plus some alfalfa and mixed hay.

Steve, Jr., 21, a graduate of

Cobleskill Agriculture Technical School, New York, has returned to the family operation. He and his wife, Becky, who is employed by York Bank, live on a farm adjoining the "home place."

Gretta, 19, is a chemistry, pre-med major at Juniata University. A freshman at Northeastern High School, 15-year-old Dan works on the farm and shows beef cattle in the 4-H program, as all the Gross children have done.

The Gross' are active in numerous agriculture and community organizations. Steve is on the board of the county farmer's association, and Phyllis serves on church council and is a long-time member of Agri-Women. During the November annual meeting of American Agri-Women, hosted by Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Phyllis won the grand door prize of a riding lawn mower.

In her visits with farmers across York County, Phyllis has observed a trend that stirs in her some concern for the future of the area's family farm tradition. More and more farm families, she relates, are supplementing their agriculture income with outside jobs, or becoming part-time farmers.

That's the sort of information that statistical survey data is designed to relay to federal government and other policymaking bodies. Future agriculture direction will be based significantly on the information that enumerators gather through personal interviews.

When Phyllis Gross and other enumerators for the statistics service knock at farmers' doors, they offer a unique opportunity to tell a personal farm story, which will help influence long-term ag policy for the nation and the world.



Baltimore area nutrition professionals talked with Washington public health specialist Dr. Katherine Armstrong following her Dairy Council presentation.



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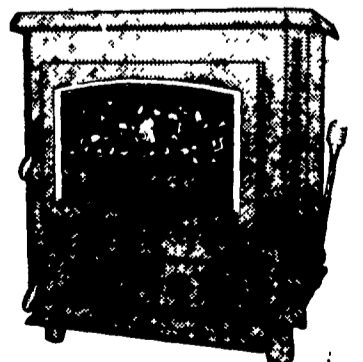
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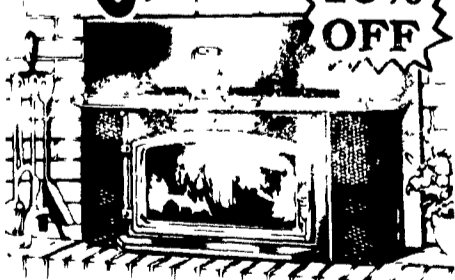
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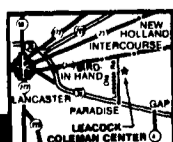
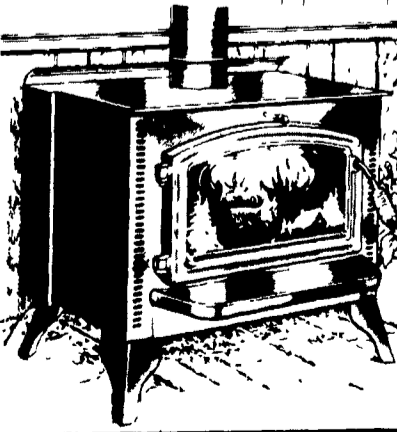
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