

Agricultural Services Update

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Manager, Ag Services

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— In June, when I started as the Manager of Agricultural Services for The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the first phase of the job was to meet with a broad cross-section of the Lancaster ag industry and hear firsthand their views on area agriculture and the direction it's heading.

In reflecting upon those conversations, one impression is particularly strong. Set aside the diversity of products and market-- forget all about Lancaster County's natural advantages-- don't think in terms of acres and dollar volumes of crops-- the real strength of Lancaster County agriculture, particularly as we address the problems and challenges of the 90s, lies in the dedication, the enthusiasm and the basic optimism of the people involved in the industry on a daily basis.

It is these men and women, working in all aspects of the ag community whose labor and, more importantly, ideas will determine the future strength of Lancaster agriculture. It is from you that I have drawn my thoughts in five general areas where I anticipate devoting my efforts. A couple are fairly specific and well-defined; others may take a while to develop-- in either case, however, they do provide the outline of the direction I see the chamber going with its agricultural programs.

MARKETING OF LANCASTER COUNTY PRODUCTS

The goal of capitalizing on the already positive image of Lancaster County products in the agricultural marketplace through use of a "Lancaster label" and an advertising campaign is by no means a new idea. But, no one to date has taken the lead in organizing and developing the concept. It is our intent to proceed with this by establishing an ad hoc group,

including representatives of the Chamber Ag Committee, the County Extension Service and the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau, as well as those presently involved in production and/or marketing of the county's products.

The mission of this group will be to thoroughly investigate all aspects of such a project and, if the decision is made to proceed, implement for the 1991 market season.

The logical starting point for such a campaign is with fresh fruits and vegetables, but if the program develops as anticipated, there can be substantial spin-off benefit to the full range of Lancaster County agricultural products, and give a focal point for possible new value-added agricultural industries.

LONG-TERM AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Related to the first topic, but broader and of a more long-range nature, the goal in this case is to be a motivating factor in the long-term economic viability of both individual farmers and the related ag-industries dependent upon them. The basic thrust will be to continually monitor new sources of farm income-- anything from disposing of leaves or grass clippings to exotic specialty crops to alternative enterprises designed to use modern low-input technology.

Another aspect of this general area is identifying and assisting with the financing and start-up of processing or other value-added industries. A natural "fit" with other economic development activity at The Chamber, this might address an existing void in processing or distribution or be custom-designed for a new or specialty crop. Integrated agricultural businesses whereby the waste or by-product of one becomes an input to the production process of another is a related area that needs to be watched. As research and

resulting technology address what are today considered problems (e.g., excess manure), they may in the future become valuable sources of farm income.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

An all-encompassing term, but as used here focuses primarily on the goal of increased dialogue and understanding between the farm and non-farm segments of the population. Inherent in this is the need for an accurate and positive voice on issues-- often misunderstood by the general public-- of importance to agriculture.

Availability as a speaker for non-ag groups, news articles or columns directed toward the general public, and coordination of a pro-agriculture T.V. ad campaign are all means of addressing this issue and can be expected in the future.

POLITICAL/LEGISLATIVE /REGULATORY

It is generally agreed that one of the major influences on the way farmers do business in the 90s will be the increasing amount of regulation directed at farmers by all levels of government. Not only do these involve a direct cost to the farmer, but too often regulations are subject to varied interpretations or are conflicting from one regulatory body to the next, thus leaving the farmer in a very vulnerable position.

Hopefully, over time, the Manager of Agricultural Services can be perceived as a powerful voice for a united Lancaster County agriculture and, therefore, have a positive, common-sense impact on legislative or regulatory matters. Plans are to monitor the legislative situation through regular contact with area legislators and the staff of the state Senate and House agriculture committees. Likewise, regular contact with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture will be necessary to stay current on activity from that direction.

At the local level, assistance

with coordination of local ordinances, serving as a resource for information, or simply providing the agricultural perspective to local municipal governments should have a very positive effect.

Depending on the situation, additional action could conceivably take the form of direct individual contact, suggestions for action by individual farmers or farm groups, or recommendation of a formal statement of position by the Chamber. In all cases, the intent is to augment, not replace, the activities of other politically active groups and thereby strengthen the overall effort for the benefit of area farmers.

INFORMATION/CONSULTANT/REFERRAL SERVICE

Looking toward the goal of Lancaster County's farmers making the maximum economic use of the wealth of information, products and services available in the county, an "Agricultural Product and Services Directory" has been

suggested. Using this as a starting point, there is some thought it could evolve into a referral, "match-making" or consultant service.

My thinking on this topic is still loose and open, so feedback would be most appropriate and appreciated. How beneficial would this type of effort be? To whom? Does it duplicate services already available? Or, at what point would we be competing with the private sector? These questions are all relevant and need to be addressed.

A FINAL THOUGHT

While the initiatives set forth appear to be the priorities at this point, they are intended to be neither all inclusive nor exclusive of other opportunities that might evolve.

As always, your reactions and new ideas are most appreciated. Feel free to call me at 397-3531 or drop a note to me at P.O. Box 1558, Lancaster, PA 17603-1558.

Your Land May Be Headed Downstream

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — "Is your land going down the stream?" asks John Fior, soil conservationist of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

Sediment is the number one pollutant by volume of our streams in the county. Accelerated erosion, or erosion other than that caused by natural process, is the cause of this sediment. Farming, construction sites, and any of man's other earth-moving activities are all contributing sources of this pollutant.

The water quality damages that result from this pollutant are affecting all of us. It causes streams and rivers to become clogged, causes more frequent flooding and creates swampland.

Sediment fills lakes and municipal water supply reservoirs. It clogs roadside ditches, plugs culverts, and decreases bridge capacities. "To clean up and repair these damages costs the general public money in the form of tax dollars or adds to the cost of commodities we buy," said Fior.

Through the installation of surface water control systems, most of these damages can be eliminated. In the process of reducing runoff to a minimum, erosion is also reduced. Many of the surface water control practices used on agricultural land can be adapted to urban construction. These practices can range from simple proper revegetation of bare soils to concrete channel linings.

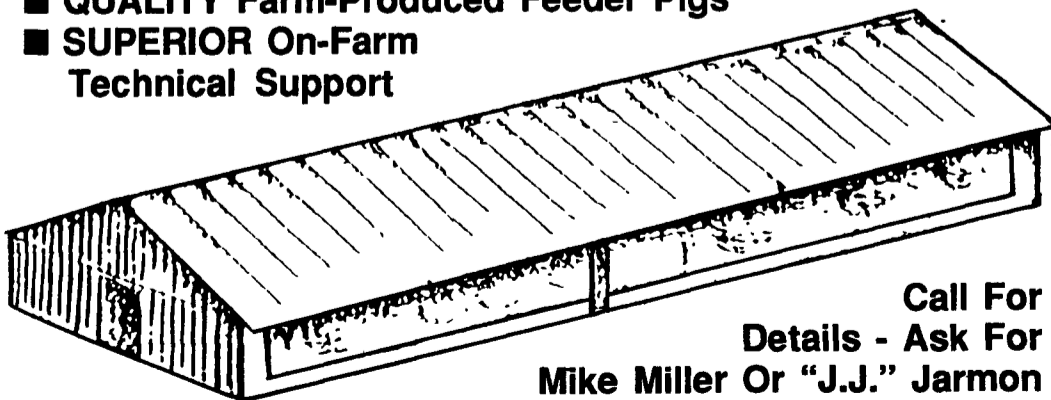


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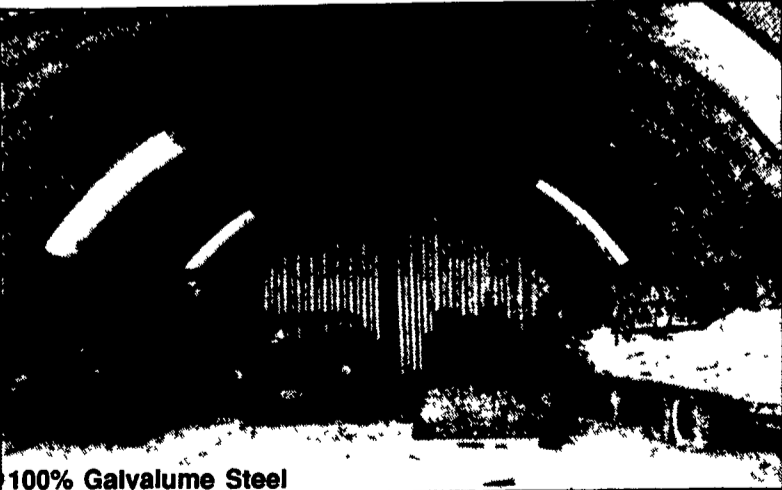
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