

# Hard Work Brings Success To Top Two Pa. Teens

**LOU ANN GOOD**

**Lancaster Farming Staff  
BESSEMER (Lawrence Co.)** — Two friends, Robert Hodge and Edward Clark, were jubilant when named FFA regional winners, but when each achieved the State Star Award, ecstasy reigned.

To have two state wins from the same FFA chapter is incredible.

Larry Redding, director of the Department of Ag Education, said that 234 students who had received Keystone Degrees were eligible to compete for the State Star Degrees. Only three percent of the ag students received Keystone Degrees, for which students need to accumulate credit over a four-year period.

Both winners attribute much of their success to their Mohawk FFA advisor, Clifford Wellis, who is a stickler for keeping project records.

"Keeping records is the secret to success in business, too," said Robert Hodge, the State Star Agribusiness winner. Edward Clark, the State Star Farmer, emphasized that record keeping on the farm was also instrumental in helping him win.

**Robert Hodge**

Hodge had his start in the business world while in sixth grade. He recalled that a neighbor gave him a bicycle in exchange for his help in building a livestock fence. The neighbor, who was in sales for a local feedmill, encouraged Hodge to sell bird feed.

At first, Hodge purchased the feed in 100-pound bags and repackaged them in 10-pound bags that he sold to friends and neighbors.

Soon he realized that more money could be made if he mixed the feed himself. Hodge custom-blended bird feed according to his customers' wants. He said a higher

quality bird feed, with sunflower seeds, millet, and cracked corn, attracts song birds.

He sold about 500 pounds of bird feed that first year.

Impressed with the marketability of pet foods, Hodge decided to open up his own store.

Nearby was an unused, dilapidated township building. Hodge convinced township officials to let him use the building in exchange for painting it and mowing the township grass.

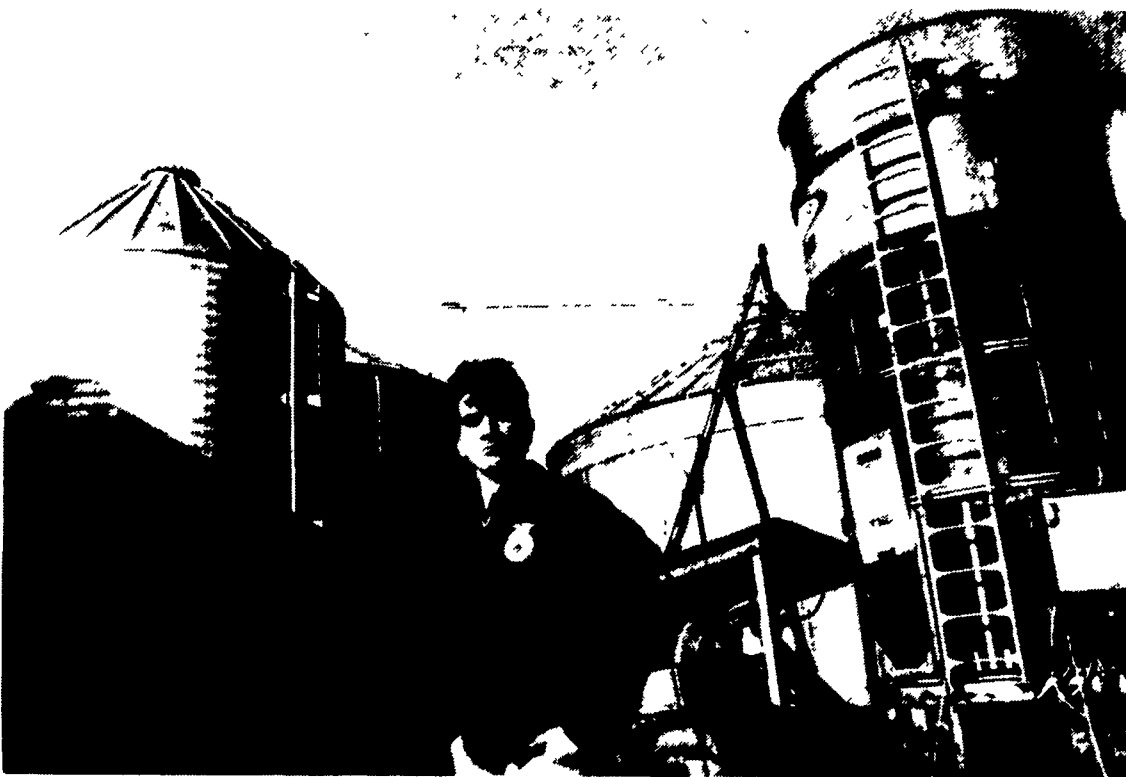
In December 1986, Hodge opened his store with supplies for farm animals, pets, and birds. He also purchased a mower to do custom mowing for businesses. Soon he needed to purchase a truck and trailers to move the mowing equipment.

The Hodge family has a 106-acre farm in Bessemer. Ron and Eleanor Hodge, the parents, own a farm supply company. The family does crop farming on about 200 acres. They buy and sell grain, fertilizer, beef cattle, and a few pigs.

Hodge's store took a change in operation when an orchard grower and Hodge combined apple sales with bird feed at local stores. Hodge talked to every grocery store in the area and sold 10 tons of bird feed last year. He would like to contact urban area stores where he believes sales would be consistent year around.

"Grocery stores look for an attractive package but cheaper quality," Hodge said. He mixes corn, wheat, and milo with a cement mixer.

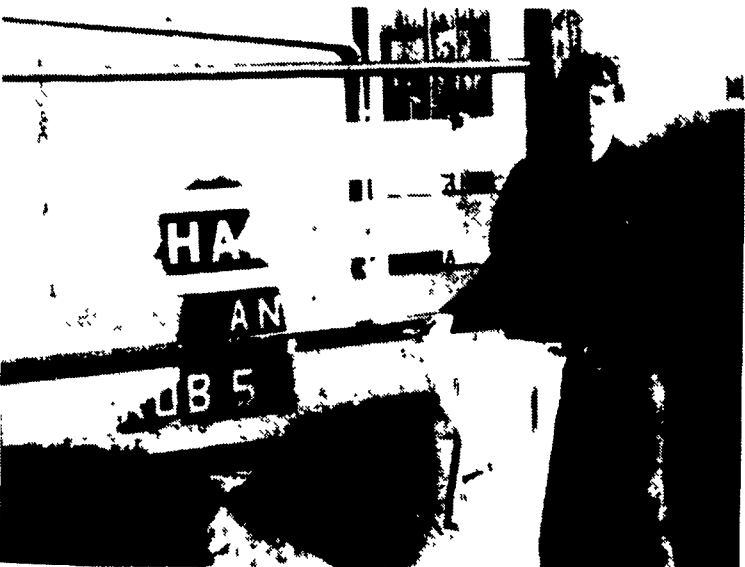
Hodge moved his supplies into his dad's business and now concentrates more on wholesale sales to other stores. "The store is not located in an area where most people drive through every day, but most farmers know about the store," Hodge said.



Although farm responsibilities often prevent Ed from joining his friends for recreation, Ed said, "What I'm doing is more important than having a good time. I never want to give up farming."



For the first time ever, two students from the same FFA chapter won both the State Star farmer and the State Star Agribusiness Award. Edward Clark and Robert Hodge will compete for the regional U.S. title, and if successful there, they will be eligible for the national title. Robert Hodge is shown above.



Robert Hodge owns and operates Rob's Feed and Supply, which he began in the sixth grade. Last year, he sold more than 20,000 pounds of bird seed.



Robert's skills include shop activities. He built his own trailer for his lawn mowing business.

Hodge said that it is necessary for him to keep inventory. The problem he faces as a small business is that he must order bags at least 5,000 at a time. Because he uses different size bags for bird, dog, cat, rabbit, chicken, horse and cow feed, it requires a large inventory of bags.

"I like dealing with people and store managers. The most fun is delivering and picking up feed," he said.

Hodge has advertized his business in the area's small shopper paper, a local newspaper, and in the yellow pages.

Like many businessmen, Hodge had a customer who ran up credit and did not pay. He took her to court over the \$600 bill, but said that it looks like she is not able to pay the amount owed, so he will need to settle for less.

"Now my advice to anyone who wants credit is to go to the bank — that's what they are for," Hodge said.

For those who want to start up their own business, Hodge stresses the importance of keeping good records, maintaining sufficient inventory, and keeping the store display attractive. "You've got to let people know that you are interested in selling. Be serious. If you

aren't, people won't take you seriously and they'll go someplace else," he said.

"In business, you need a good personality, ability to work with people, ability to handle problems, and a sense of humor," Hodge added.

The 18-year-old enjoys observing people and getting a feel for the way he should present himself.

He said that bird feed sales is largely dependent upon the weather. He said, "This year, we haven't had much snow, so sales are down."

In the past, Hodge has won FFA salesmanship contests in area and regional competitions where he was graded on his ability to organize, his knowledge of the subject, his ability to write a sales slip, and make change.

"FFA is a great way to learn record keeping, parliamentary procedure, and leadership," Hodge said.

Now that Hodge has won state competition, he will compete for the Eastern U.S. region. For that competition, contestants from the U.S. are divided into four regions. The winners from these four regions will compete in Kansas for the national star agribusinessman title.

While Hodge, who is chapter FFA president, is finishing his final year of high school, he is taking liberal art courses at the Beaver County Community College. He is working toward a degree in avionics.

"I like to be busy. I hate to sit around," Hodge said of his busy schedule.

(Turn to Page B5)

# Homestead Notes