

Last York County Livestock Auction Closes

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York Co. Correspondent
STEWARTSTOWN (York Co.) — The last livestock auction in York County went out of business this week.

Isennock Auction Services, which operated the Stewartstown livestock auction, ran the last calves, cattle and hogs through its ring late Monday evening. When the last animal cleared the ring, even the holding lot separating gates were available for sale.

While regular buyers and sellers who used the auction service learned of its closing in mid-September, the decision to discontinue the livestock sales portion of the Stewartstown facility was made well over a year ago. Sales of produce, poultry, rabbits and tools will continue as before at the Monday evening auction.

"The number of cattle going through the sale has dropped off a couple of hundred head each year," says Cindy Isennock, co-owner with her husband, Robert, of Isennock Auction Services, Inc., White Hall, Maryland. "And in the last year, five of the local dairy farmers who supported the sale with their cattle and calves went out of business."

Only in 1991 did the auction's numbers take an upswing trend since it opened for business in January, 1989. And that, say the Isennocks, was primarily related to several local farmers going out of business and marketing their herds that year. In the last nine months, total number of head was down 582 from the same period one year ago.

Along with declining numbers of livestock supporting the auction and loss of local farmers, the Isennocks cite several other reasons for their decision to cease handling cattle, hogs and sheep.

Fewer buyers and slaughter-packing facilities, skyrocketing insurance rates, especially workmen's compensation coverage, increasing numbers of hogs raised under contract, and the changing American diet focusing on less beef and dairy products all contribute to the declining auction numbers, the Isennocks believe.

Buyers and sellers of livestock on hand to watch the final night of auction Monday evening noted that, while the closing is an inconvenience to the local farm business, auctions in neighboring counties will probably fill the gap.

Stan Godfrey, partner in the family-owned Godfrey Brothers Meats at Loganville, expects to do more buying for their retail market use at the various Lancaster County livestock auctions, as well as the Tuesday evening one held at Westminster, Maryland.

Terry Strohecker, livestock buyer from Herndon, had no definite game plan for replacing the numbers he normally bought at Stewartstown.

Brad Yost, Loganville, bought calves at the evening auction for Jeff Craig of Greencastle Sales. Since a full-time job prohibits him from attending day sales, Yost was uncertain if he would continue buying livestock at all.

Local dairy farmer Bob Gross, of nearby Fawn Grove, marketed his calves through the Stewartstown sale. Gross predicted he will use Lancaster County auctions more heavily and added that, on occasion, he has hauled animals during the night to Lancaster area sales so he could be back home in time for morning milking.

The Stewartstown facility has been a local livestock marketing source for York County farmers since 1964. The Sechrist family, which owned and operated it for many years, sold the auction in the mid-1980's to an out-of-county owner who continued to run it as the York County Livestock Auction. The Isennocks took over the auction in December, 1988, opening for business the first Monday evening in 1989.

"This was simply a business decision," affirms Cindy Isennock, of the closing of the Stewartstown livestock auction.

ONE MORE DOMINO

While the auction's closing, in itself, is not expected to create severe hardship overall to the county's livestock business, long-time industry observers see it's demise as "one more domino" in the continuing decline of agriculture and related agri-business in York County.

"There are at least 25 feed stores that once operated in York County that have gone out of busi-



York County's last livestock auction closed Monday evening after the evening's consignments of cattle and hogs cleared the sale arena. Isennock Auction Service, Inc., plans to continue the weekly sales of produce, small animals, and tools.

ness since the mid-1960s," says Marlyn Flaharty, owner and operator of Service Feed and Supply, Delta. "The 'free market' portion of feed business, as opposed to feed sold through contracting arrangements, has gone way down over the years."

"With fewer farmers, there's less need for feed mills," Flaharty states, summing up the declining

need for all ag-related services. "We're in the people business now - gardening, pet supplies - rather than in the agriculture business." Continuing population expansion into York County from Harrisburg and Baltimore is expected to only intensify that squeeze on ag land and the loss of farmers.

The Delta feed and fertilizer

supplier cites studies which have shown that if feed orders could be handled on a controlled, two-shift basis, a full half of the operating feed mills in Pennsylvania could be closed down. And, Flaharty's firm, along with Codorus Fertilizer Service at Codorus, are the only two remaining independent fertilizer suppliers located in York County. (Turn to Page A37)



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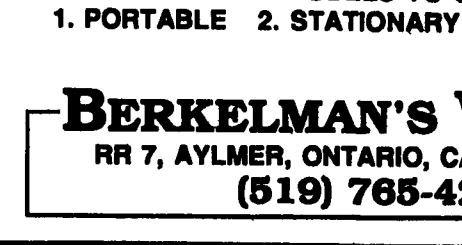
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