

Irwins On Goodwill Tour To Romania

EVERETT NEWSWANGER
Managing Editor

DUMESTI, ROMANIA — In the village where about 5,000 farmers live and farm the land around the town, the people have experienced the love and caring attitudes of two goodwill educators from the U.S. And from these ambassadors the villagers have learned what real Americans are like and have received helpful production information that we all take for granted.

All this happened because two volunteers, Jay Irwin, retired Lancaster County agent, and his wife Betty went to Romania for five weeks to assist the people under a program called Volunteers In Overseas Cooperative Assistance from Washington, D.C. Jay and Betty are quite experienced in this type of work as they spent six months in Poland under the sponsorship of a Penn State program in cooperative extension. This time in Romania, the idea was to help farm people who have just emerged from Communism in 1989 to develop the skills and attitudes that will allow the new democracy to function.

Right now, the people are angry because the Communists took all their land, but now only a small portion of their land is being returned to them. After winning the confidence of the people and bringing hope for a better life through associations of farmers working together, the attitudes of the people noticeably changed by the time the visit ended.

"We understand their situation," Jay said. "They are coming out from under a government system that prevented organization and did not allow for individuals to make decisions. But we told them in America farmers have found they must work together to better themselves. This takes an attitude

that allows people to trust one another.

"The mayor of the town was our sponsor," Jay said. "He was the one who requested we come. He had been in prison for seven years, but he was not bitter. He could joke about it. One of the major differences between the people of Poland and Romania is that Polish people do not laugh much. I think you have made progress if you can laugh at yourself," Jay said.

At first the people were skeptical. No one had ever come to their village who did not have ulterior motives. But after they found that Jay and Betty just wanted to help them and give ideas on what worked for American farmers, the local people's attitudes changed.

The mayor confided at the end of the visit that his people had changed attitudes that were more peaceable. They could sit down and work out their problems. We were really pleased to know we had a positive effect on the people," Jay said.

Various problems are evident on Romania's farms. Cows are fed corn stover and only a little grain. On one large farm of 600 cows, production was about 10 pounds of milk per day. They didn't know about alfalfa.

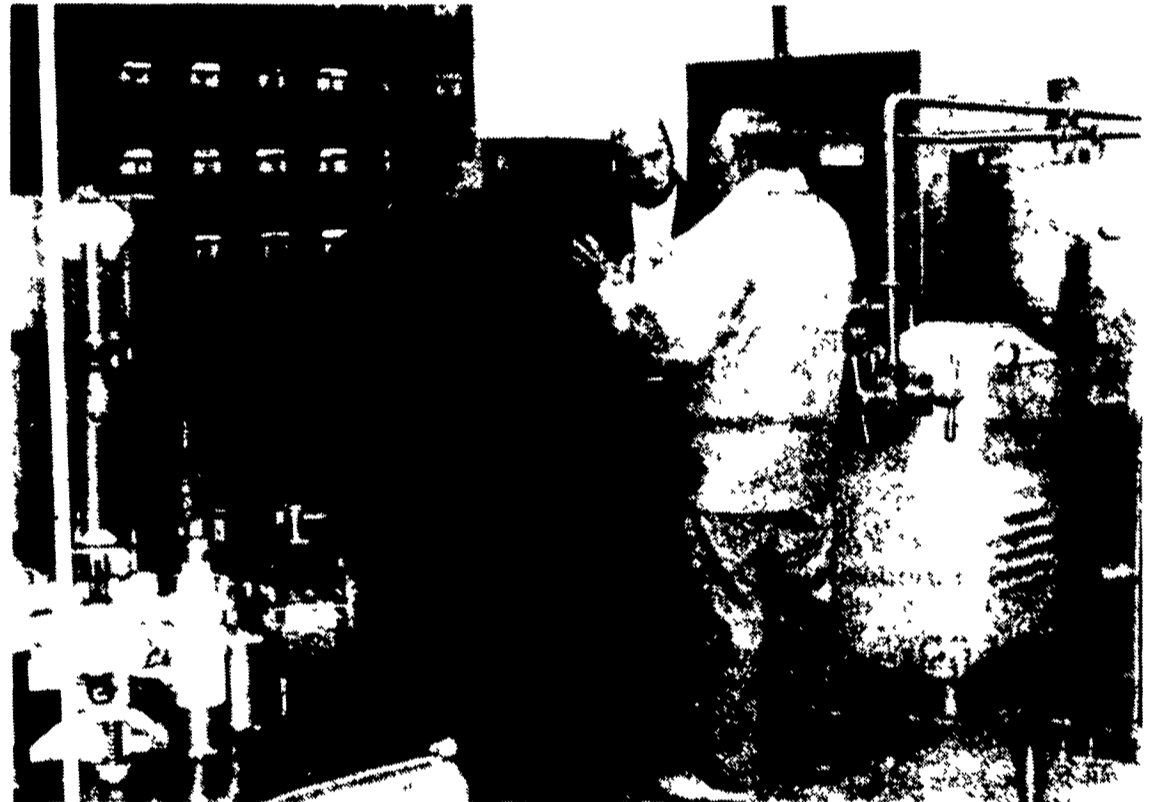
And quality control in their factories is a major problem. New equipment often breaks down shortly after it is purchased. There is no competition and no incentive to make things better.

While they have excellent research facilities at the University, they don't have an extension system to get the information to the people. One of Jay's suggestions was for the people from the University, engineers, and local farm leaders to meet four times each year to exchange information. At

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Jay Irwin gets a sled ride from a local farmer while visiting Romania.

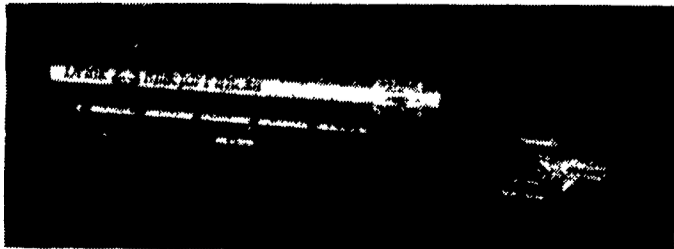


Benuel Lapp, center, and Jay Irwin, right, visit Lapp's demonstration farm in Romania. The interpreter, left, was not needed but was very interested in the conversation. Irwin said that walking into the Lapp barn felt like being at home in Lancaster County.



Jay and Betty Irwin treasure gifts given to them by Romanian farm families.

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