

Vanishing Acres: Surrounded By Development, Farmers Face Tough Decisions

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extension agent, recalled the day with a shrug. "It caused some problems," he said, trying to be nonchalant. Then he got serious. "But that was probably the biggest problem that we ever had."

While inspecting his fields recently, Lehigh County dairyman John Valkovec reached down to pull up some newly seeded alfalfa. Instead of merely making hay, he had to stop and remove all sorts of trash in his field that could wreak havoc with his equipment.

Valkovec said one day he was mowing five acres of alfalfa near a development. Some residents decided to use the field as a driving range. The dairyman had to stop several times to remove golf balls — in all, he picked 100 balls from the field.

But the golf balls haven't been nearly as frustrating as the empty beer cans.

"When you're chopping silage, before you see the cans, they're on the load and you have to throw the load away," said Valkovec.

On a hot day in early July this year, Jacob Stahl, a Lancaster County poultryman, was using a

one-inch thick cabling that could have heavily damaged his equipment. He mowed around it. But the grass was unbelievably, dangerously thick. The mowing was slow going, until the the big heavy bar unhooked after striking a rock, and stopped.

Forrest Wessner, a Lehigh County cash crop and potato farmer, remembers plowing a field one spring. A neighbor came up to him and asked him to turn down the tractor's radio, because it was, according to the neighbor, "making too much noise."

Joe Stahl, son of Lancaster County poultry farmer Jacob Stahl, said he was working on the farm one day when a neighbor asked him about some fencing on the farm property. The neighbor wanted to put in a split rail fence at the corner of the lot. The neighbor, who was landscaping a newly purchased home, asked Joe if the fence on the farm property was going to be replaced.

Joe said the neighbor suggested to him that a split rail fence would look a whole lot nicer than the farmer's "rusting fence back there, and it would help my property."

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sicklebar mower to remove some heavy brush in a detention basin near some newly constructed houses. At the edge of the basin, the farmer worried about how close he could cut to electrical and telephone cabling that provides service to residents of a new development.

In addition, property markers — lengths of wood of all sizes — poked up here and there, almost with abandon. In the same field, Stahl had found some discarded

Stories of how farmers deal with neighbors — from farmers complaining about trespassing snowmobile riders and four-wheel vehicle operators to housing residents who sue farmers because of the noise of corn driers or tractors — abound in the heavily populated counties of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The farmers complain because the residents don't understand farming. They've never experienced life on a farm. They don't



While residents in the surrounding development were celebrating with food and fireworks on a July 4 evening, Tim Fritz was getting concerned and irritated. Residents were shooting fireworks into a herd of young Holstein cows and heifers on some pastureland that was hemmed in by new houses. "It caused some problems," he said, trying to be nonchalant. Then he got serious. "But that was probably the biggest problem that we ever had."

understand agriculture.

Residents see flies invading backyard summer holiday barbecues and want to tell the farmer what they think about that freshly spread manure.

"We get a lot of calls from the public," said Leon Ressler, Lancaster County ag environment agent who deals with farm/urban interface issues.

Most commonly, in the summer, the complaints against farmers mount. Sometimes it's the odor from freshly spread manure. Often it is the farmer, intent on getting the cropwork finished, working the fields too late. Many times it can be the noises generated by the sound of tractor engines, grain driers, feed mixers, and whatnot.

But the most common problem

is the flies — especially when manure is applied near a development. If the manure is not worked into the soil, the fly larvae hatch, and the cycle can continue on. Even though the common housefly has only a 10-12 day lifecycle, succeeding generations can sprout and overtake a field.

And fly in through open win-

lems demand more communication between the farmer and the neighbors.

"I try to encourage the neighbor to find out who the farmer is and talk to him to discuss the problem," said Ressler. "I also give them some suggestions on what they can do to reduce the problems over the short-term."

But even with precautions and

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dows in new houses.

There are no simple strategies, according to Ressler. Even Joe Stahl admits that the fly issue is the "greatest challenge" for farmers. Stahl admits that, when it comes to good neighbor relations, the fly problem is "our worst enemy."

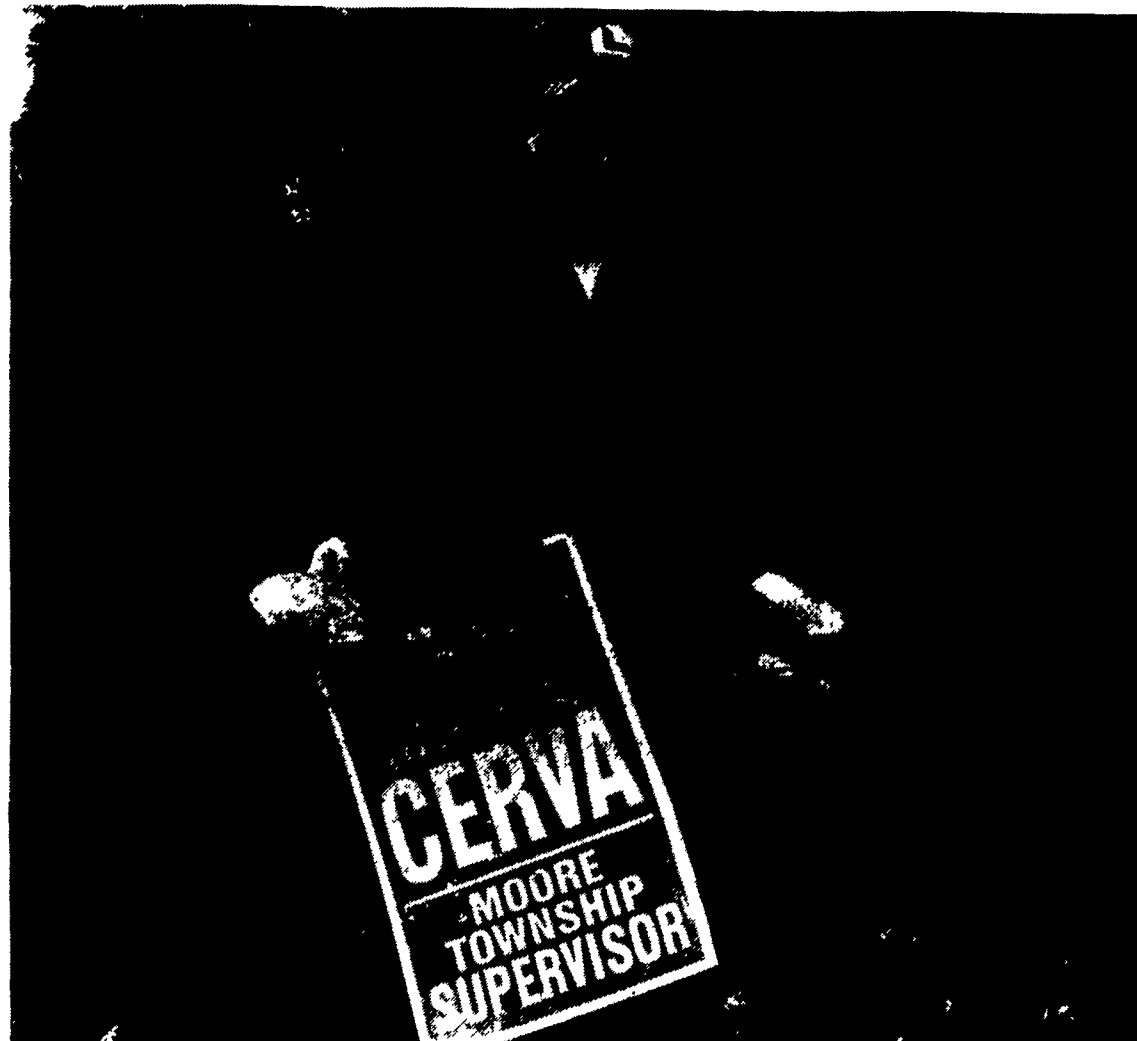
Early incorporation of the manure by moldboard plowing can go a long way to stopping fly problems, according to Ressler. Other prob-

lem management strategies, the challenge for farmers in dealing with neighbors in new residential housing goes on.

For John Valkovec and family, the urban challenge is from cities such as Philadelphia and from those who make the daily commute from New Jersey.

For Fred Seipt, co-owner of Freddy-Hill Farms in Landsdale, the residents who surround his

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On a hot day in early July this year, Jacob Stahl, right, a Lancaster County poultryman, was using a sicklebar mower to remove some heavy brush in a detention basin near some newly constructed houses. At the edge of the basin, the farmer worried about how close he could cut to electrical and telephone cabling that serviced residents of a new development. Stahl stands with son Joe, far left, and Joe's son James.