

Vanishing Acres: Pressured By Development, Farmers Become Neighbor Relations Experts

Last Of A Series

Editor's Note: In the final part of the series, farmers realize that farming in the 1990s is not only crops and cows — it's nurturing communications skills and

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learning how to deal with an increasingly urban public. Despite development pressures, these farmers have learned to communicate their problems and work to solve "neighbor relations" challenges.

Neighbor relations skills will be essential. The farmer of tomorrow will have to be a good neighbor.

— Charles Wille
N.Y. Farm Bureau President

Headline from June 5, 1993 Lancaster Farming: 'Key To Successful Farming

'Once the houses are up, the developer is gone.'

Among Urban Neighbors: Be Firm, Be Friendly, But Don't Be Frustrated'

ANDY ANDREWS
Lancaster Farming Staff
KLECKNERSVILLE (Northampton Co.) — One day, it rained. It rained heavy and hard, and flooding ensued.

John Valkovec, dairy farmer, received the call from one of the Moore Township supervisors. Stormwater was causing enormous flooding in one of Valkovec's fields, pouring dirt, stones, and muddy water onto Rt. 512, a major highway that runs adjacent to fields he farms.

Valkovec tried to deal with the problem.

Confused and perturbed, he asked for help. For one thing, the catchbasin created by the development architects next to his field was overflowing. The water was coming from the development property. The engineers assured him that the basin was designed correctly.

installed some plywood to redirect the flow. But the stormwater caused enormous gullies in the field.

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But Valkovec told the engineer, "According to the calculations, that's great, but look at the ditches I have in the field."

Valkovec couldn't get anywhere with the situation.

Instead, he took matters into his own hands. He constructed a waterway, losing almost an acre of land from production.

To this day, Valkovec believes

he made the right decision.

"I would rather lose the acre of land than have to go through gullies like that" with field equipment, he said.

Valkovec said that zoning laws don't specify how many developments are constructed. While many supervisors remain "antide-

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velopment," said Valkovec, still, many developers come, build, and leave.

"The developer, he's long gone. Once the houses are up, the developer is gone. The township keeps money to make sure the roads are built, but forget the rest of it."

Left and right, in all areas of the township, Valkovec, who milks 50



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cows and farms a total of 500 acres, said similar problems confront those who farm.

This is not only true of towns in Pennsylvania, but in other parts of the country.

According to the Vol II., No 2 issue of "Farmland Update," the newsletter published by the American Farmland Trust, between 1990-1992, a place in Illinois called McHenry became the fastest-growing county in the state. The population exploded by 90.2 percent to 200,000 residents. No other counties in Illinois came close to meeting that growth rate.

Since then, development pressure has increased. Farmers have

1,000-acre farm. "Everything is happening so fast. The disturbing thing is we knew 'progress' was coming, but we didn't plan for it."

ery County, more complaints occur because there are a lot more farms around and neighbors don't have the same concerns. The

'When you look at a map of southeastern Pennsylvania, it's pretty scary,' he said. 'Growth is just coming from all over.'

Like Lancaster, according to the newsletter, the county has to work out the problems encountered with encroaching urban development in a rural setting. But Lancaster's zoning is successful because of

neighbors "don't appreciate the farm as much."

In Montgomery County, development pressure has been growing exponentially. "It just keeps on pushing. In the seven years I've

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tight regulations created by urban growth boundaries.

But growth boundaries and ag zones to help contain development may not be enough. In the end, the communications skills that farmers cultivate with their non-farm neighbors could prove even more successful for farm survivability.

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The Fritz dairy rarely gets complaints. Tim Fritz, who also serves as Montgomery County crops agent, has to handle many complaints from the urban and farm sector in a county which has seen as much, if not more, development pressure as Lancaster.

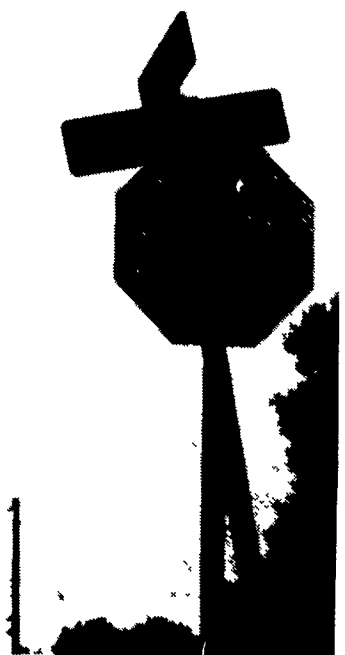
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For Montgomery County, the closer farms are to the urban center, the more pressured the farm is, but the less complaints, less conflicts from urban side. Fritz said, "They appreciate the farm when there's so few left. It's more favorable for them to see the farm."

However, Fritz said that, in the more rural portions of Montgom-

been in Montgomery County, I just watched the line move. You can see it by the signs for land for sale, land available. You can see it by

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A sign near the Valkovec property in Northampton County. Lancaster County farmer Joe Stahl said the chance to meet many more urban neighbors allows him to talk to many different and interesting people. And building those relationships — working together — may be the key to survival for many farmers.



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