

Book Researches Amish Culture's Influence On Transition

Amish Find Success In Business

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff

ELIZABETHTOWN (Lancaster Co.) — Amish and farming seem inseparable.

But Amish enterprises are popping up all over this county and in more than 200 other Amish settlements in 22 states and Canada. Amish and business may become the norm in the next decade.

It's not that Amish are deserting the farm, but there aren't enough farms for the rising Amish population, which doubles every 20 years.

A newly released book, "Amish Enterprise From Plows to Profits," written by Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, takes an in-depth look at the Amish businesses, lifestyles, and how the transition from farm to business is affecting Amish culture.

This transition was brought on largely by what author Kraybill calls a population squeeze. Even if land prices had remained low, there simply are not enough farms for the rising Amish population.

Approximately 14 county farms go on the market each year — compare that with 200 Amish couples that marry and begin independent living each year.

They could, of course, work for other businesses. Some do.

In the mid-sixties, many Amish boys were going to work in local factories. There, they faced a daily battle with the worldly influence of blaring music, profane language, and organized labor. The harsh recession of the 1970s ended up with many unemployed Amish. It forced many of them to take a new look at options.

Some families headed for new settlements, but strong family and community ties kept many from seeking refuge in distant states.

It seemed more logical and convenient to their lifestyle to start up a cottage industry or shop at their dwelling.

The first few Amish enterprises in Lancaster area were closely tied to agriculture. Blacksmiths, harness makers, and carpenters supplied items their own people needed and couldn't buy elsewhere. Some soon discovered the tourist trade was a viable venture.

The book includes an historical account of the Amish that explores how their culture both honed and deterred their entrepreneurial skills.

The Amish have a long-standing tradition of a father providing a farm for each son. The hard work, long hours, and belief that God commanded one to earn a living by the sweat of his brow contributed to helping the Amish become diligent business owners.

"The brightest people in Amish society enter business because without high school or college they are not able to enter other professions," Kraybill said.

A survey shows that only four percent of Amish businesses fail compared to 63 percent of new businesses in the society at large as failing within the first six years.

Amish business people typically violate all the accepted assumptions that are necessary for beginning their own businesses.

"They have only an eighth grade education, do not use 110-volt electricity, do not own motor vehicles or computers, and do not prepare strategic plans. As an educa-

tor, it sounds anti-education to say that the Amish success rate is so high," Kraybill said.

Among other things, he credits much of their success to the ethic of hard work transferred from the farm, and the creative use of apprenticeship to train young entrepreneurs.

Typically Amish start with little or no debt, use family labor at their at-home location, and prefer to stay small. Their austere lifestyles allow them to put more profit back into the business. One Amish said that he could live on \$10,000 with six children.

Few Amish-owned firms existed before the 1970s. Twenty years later, almost a thousand shops have sprung up in the Lancaster area. Some are part-time or seasonal. Some began as a sideline and developed into full-time work.

Of all full-time businesses, more than half have annual sales topping \$100,000. One-third of the firms with two or more employees have sales above \$500,000.

Surprisingly for the Amish culture, about 20 percent of the entrepreneurs are women, most who started making and selling foods and quilts on the side and soon found themselves operating a shop and even hiring employees.

Traditionally Amish women are expected to be full-time mothers and not divide their energies in seeking a career. But many wives assist their husbands in bookkeeping and in some production work.

Most home-based businesses begin in the family dwelling, farm building, storage barn or unused tobacco sheds converted into shops and retail space.

Sometimes Amish continue to operate their dairy farm with the business. But time and resources and smelling like manure while trying to convince a customer to purchase something in the shop eventually influences most to chose one or the other.

The owners are finding great satisfaction in running a business. But the transition brings a whole new set of conflicts to the Amish community who have clung to established rules throughout the centuries.

Amish businesspersons are becoming unwittingly entangled in legal matters. The church's long-standing prohibitions against litigation, politics, individualism, commercial insurance, higher education, restrictions on technology (motor vehicles, telephones, computers, and electricity) creates almost a constant dilemma. Taboos on pride restrain many from advertising and promoting their products.

As business owners, Amish now have to contend with collecting bad debts, shoplifting, product liability concerns, work-related accident worker's compensation, and other issues while maintaining the Amish stance against using force of any sort to resist evil.

Although wary of using the law to protect their personal and business rights, they have been forced to reach a compromise from necessity, especially for debt collection and liability coverage.

Amish mothers face the conflict of knowing children should come first but a customer must not be kept waiting. An in-home business does not automatically mean that the children's needs have their parents' full attention.

Church leaders fear that young people who no longer have farm chores seven days a week are ending up with too much time and too much money.

At the same time, the church leaders have become tolerant of telephones, air and hydraulic power, electrical inverters, and forklifts to do business — but not in the house.

"The Amish have long stressed the importance of separation from the outside world, but now they are doing business with the world — a world that once persecuted them — and in the process the world is transforming them and their traditional values," Kraybill said.

More than 150 Amish entrepreneurs were interviewed for the book, which details some of these businesses by name and others by occupation.

Photographs of the businesses, taken by Dennis Hughes, a Lancaster photographer, are also scattered throughout the 300-page book published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kraybill is a sociologist at Elizabethtown College. Nolt, a historian, is also the author of "A History of the Amish" and lives in Indiana.

"Amish Enterprise From Plows to Profits" is available in bookstores or may be purchased by calling Johns Hopkins University Press at 1-800-537-5487. The paper back version sells for \$14.95 and the hardcover for \$45.

Study Indicates Amish In Lancaster County Buying Farms

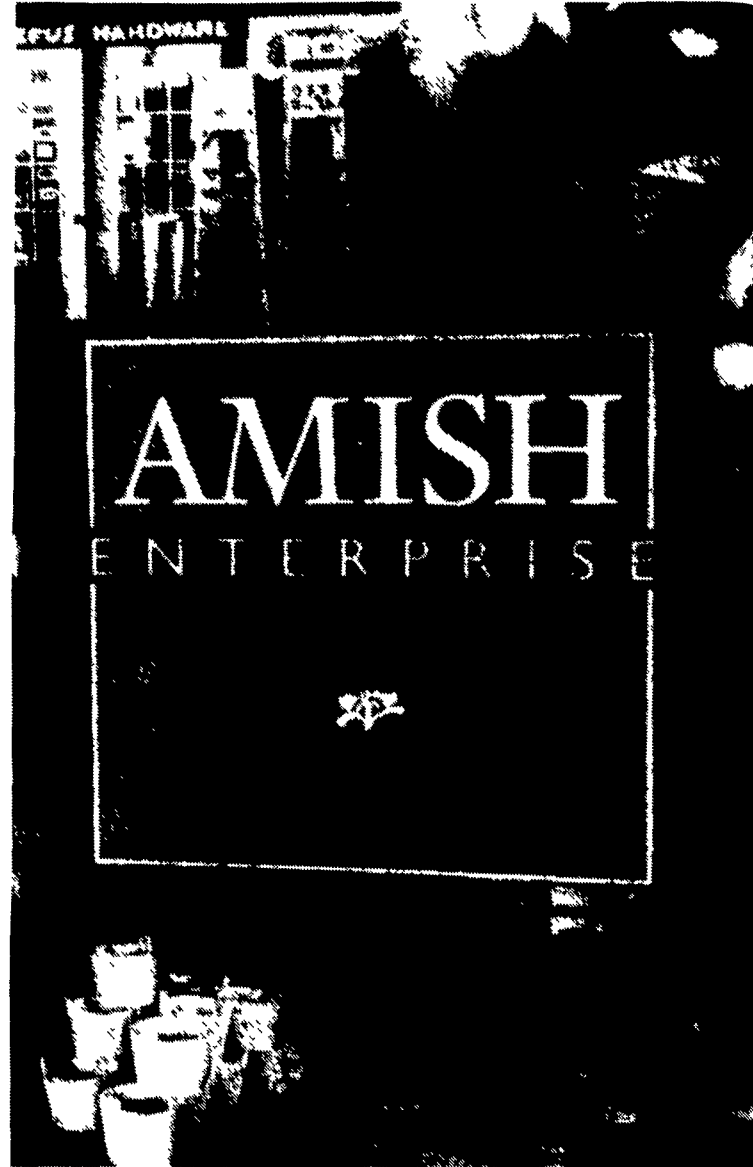
ELIZABETHTOWN (Lancaster Co.)—A newly released study shows that the Amish in Lancaster County bought 10,564 acres of farm land from 1984 to 1994.

The results are contrary to the generally accepted belief that Amish are leaving Lancaster County because of the high price of farm land, the extensive development of farm land for residential and commercial purposes, and the volume of tourists who invade the county to see, among other things, the Amish.

Conrad L. Kanagy, Ph.D., assistant professor of sociology at Elizabethtown College, did the study. Here are the results.

Summary Report Farmland Sales and Religious Affiliation in Lancaster County, PA, 1984-1994

This is a study of 1,092 farm sales in Lancaster County from 1984 to 1994. The religious affiliations of farmland buyers and sellers were obtained through church directories as well as telephone directories and subsequent phone calls. Corporations were identified in land deeds. The religious affiliation of 60% of the sellers was identified along with 72% of the buyers. The remainder were coded as "Unidentified." Only farms of 25 acres or more were included. Traditional Plain Groups include Old Order Amish and Mennonites, most who drive a horse and buggy, receive an eighth grade education, and use technology selectively. Progressive Plain Groups are Mennonites and Brethren who drive automobiles, embrace technology, and operate their own high schools and col-



An exploding Amish population results in not enough farms for newly-established households each year. Consequently, many Amish are venturing into developing their own businesses and finding success.

leges. English are those with some other religious affiliation or no affiliation. Corporations are developers and businesses. Key findings of the study include:

- Traditional Plain Groups gained 154 farms during the past decade while Progressive Plain Groups and Unidentified lost farms. Outside of Traditional Plain Groups only Corporations had a substantial gain (Table 1).

- Traditional Plain Groups gained 12,911 acres since 1984 while all others except Corporations lost acres (Table 2).

- The Amish gained more than 6 times the acres gained by Corporations during the past decade (Table 2).

- Traditional Plain Groups gained almost 79 million dollars of farmland during the past ten years while Progressive Plain Groups lost farmland valued at 22 million dollars (Table 3).

- Corporations gained nearly 19 million dollars worth of farmland (Table 3).

- From 1984-1988 the Amish gained 10 farms annually. This number increased to 13 for the period 1989-1994.

- Annually, Traditional Plain Groups are adding 14 farms, Progressive Plain Groups are losing 4, the English and Unidentified are losing 13, and Corporations are gaining 2.

- Corporation growth in farms boomed from 1988 to 1990 with a gain of 26 farms but has slowed substantially since.

- Yearling, the Amish are gaining 960 acres. Corporations are gaining 151 acres.

- Traditional Plain Groups gain 1,173 acres each year, Progressive Plain Groups lose 329 acres, English and Unidentified lose 998 acres, and Corporations gain 151 acres.

- Amish have the highest rate of within-group farm sales. Since 1984, 82% of Amish farms sold have stayed in Amish hands. The rate is only 27% for Mennonites and 24% for English. The latter are selling the majority of their farms to outsiders.

- Of all Plain Groups, Mennonites sold the highest percent (34%) to English, Corporations, and Others. The Amish sold less than half that amount (15%) to outsiders.

- Of all farm transactions since 1984, 13% were Amish to Amish sales.

- The Traditional Plain Groups gained 49 farms from the Progressive Plain Groups during the past decade. The Traditional Plain Groups gained 105 farms from the English, Corporations, and Unidentified.

- During the past two years, (Turn to Page B4)

HOMESTEAD NOTES