

Maryland Hall Of Fame Award Is Great Honor

(Continued from Page A34)

With Gov. Glendening supporting legislation that would create statewide, mandatory, phosphorus-emphasized nutrient management planning that many conjecture would place most of the state's farms into further economic turmoil, it would seem that Herbst could be cynical about the award.

In fact, John Herbst is against the proposals in the Maryland Legislature that would undo their statewide voluntary nutrient management program.

Many have concluded that what is proposed is nothing more than a political knee-jerk reaction to place blame for a Pfiesteria problem in the Chesapeake Bay that, according to recent reports, caused about \$40 million in lost seafood sales just during the last quarter of 1997.

"They're jumping the gun as far as regulations," Herbst said. "There's no scientific proof, as of yet, that it was caused by phosphorus."

"We're working to get rural legislators to submit our own legislation to keep voluntary (planning) until there's proof."

John said he is willing to make nutrient management plans based on nitrogen or phosphorus, though the penalties and fines and teams of inspectors that would come through the farm every three years to check on compliance is excessive.

So, he suspects, would be the associated costs.

Maryland agriculture has been pressured from urban sprawl development pressures, high costs of living, and, for the Herbst family and other dairy farmers, low dairy prices.

Of course, most dairy farmers across the United States have had to deal with low returns on investment, but the Maryland dairy farming community seems to have been subjected to multiple negative influences.

While the rest of the nation's dairy farmers may well have unique situations on their own

farms and in their own states that sets them at some disadvantage, Maryland's dairy farmers have had disadvantages in almost every aspect except, perhaps, access to market place.

The state has had a governor-appointed official agricultural advisory committee make recommendations to help protect its farming enterprises and support services, and preserve open spaces for all the residents, especially the new occupants of urban sprawl.

The recommendations of the committee have largely been ignored by the state's political leaders.

One of the ignored recommendations was to provide the state agriculture secretary with the authority to set minimum prices and over-order premiums for milk, similar to authorities and programs in surrounding states.

Testimony at public hearings were fairly consistent that Maryland was losing its dairy farms and processors because of predatory pricing due to beneficial margins allowed by neighboring states.

One recommendation saw realization — the formation of the Maryland Dairy Industry Association two years ago. For the first time, Maryland established an organization representing dairy farmers.

Previously, dairy farmers were lumped in with agriculture as a whole and were more or less represented by the Maryland Farm Bureau, dairy processors and cooperatives.

But Herbst isn't cynical about the Hall of Fame award.

It really means something. And he isn't cynical about the intent of most of the people involved with committees working to provide meaningful recommendations to improve the working and social climate.

To his mind, the only way to change something for the better is to become involved, and the loss of farmers sitting on committees and filling municipal posts is more a sad commentary on the lack of farmers and the lack of time for com-



Tilt waterers, mattresses and slotted flooring are part of the details in this recently built post-and-beam, 132-freestall barn with side vents and capacity for tunnelling air.

munity service.

Herbst said that one year he attended more than 90 meetings to help develop the first comprehensive plan for his county.

"It takes a lot of cooperation from those at home," he said. "A lot of times I felt I would have been better off financially if I would have stayed at home."

But in the end, he said that's not what he was brought up to believe, and experience hasn't change that.

"I always thought, if you live in a community it's important to be involved."

He said one of the greatest tributes paid to him was when some citizens were being troubled with zoning, a state senator referred the citizens to John, because he was recognized as being knowledgeable.

Also, John said he truly believes that his vote counts.

Currently he is a member of his Dairy Herd Improvement Association board of directors, and he serves on the country fair board. Both involvements began with children's activities and 4-H. They went on test when they has a registered 4-H animal that calved and needed records. He got on the 4-H board through his children showing 4-H project animals.

Herbst has something else in his experience that provides him with more calmness about the issues — several times during his lifetime he has witnessed events that could have forced his family, and perhaps did force others, out of farming.

In 1950, he originally started farming on his father Raymond's 50-acre farm, about six miles away. Raymond had purchased that farm in 1919.

Then in 1957 a road came through the farm, splitting the intersecting at the middle of the farm, creating a X-crossroads with fields on all four corners.

"I was about to give up when we purchased this farm from Cirus Newcomer," he said. It was 87 acres and started with eight cows, two horses, a 20-horse power tractor "... and a lot of used stuff," he said.

He had sold milk to Supple E, headquartered in Philadelphia with an outlet in Hagerstown.

When he moved to the new farm he joined what is now the Maryland/Virginia Dairy Cooperative. He's been with them for 40 years.

After milking by hand for

awhile, he purchased his parents milkers. When they retired he bought the farm.

He had about 25 cows by then.

Over the years John said it worked out well that when he and Betty became debt free some adjacent farmland would come up for sale. They were able to add it to their total operation and then work to pay that off.

Now in a partnership with son David and his wife Betsy, who together have four children (Andrew, Jenny, Katie, and Kimberly), the farm has grown to 370 acres owned and 70 acres rented.

A 132-tie stall barn, built post-and-beam style was recently constructed away from the old barn, sited so that, just in case they want to expand the operation in later years, it can be done fairly easily.

The manure storage is beneath the barn, which is outfitted with slotted floors. Sidewall curtains and end walls outfitted with large, closeable openings provide plenty of air flow for the herd.

John said he is proud of his son, and David said his father has taught all of his sons well, lessons passed on from Raymond.

John has two other sons; the oldest is a minister in Cumberland, Maryland, the other an accountant in Texas.

David said he never wanted to do anything else but farm, and he said he learned to work and the value of self dependence from his father.

John said, "I grew up with lean years," explaining that he worked on six farms growing up to earn money, and he also worked a thrasher for his grandfather. He said that when he told his grandfather that he was getting tired, his grandfather would say, "Come on

boy, you're not tired, you're lazy."

He said his grandfather had an old mule, "Kit," that would bring him home from the fields at night while his grandfather slept.

"I've tried to impress that on our sons and grandsons," John said. David laughed and said he did learn the lesson, which essentially is, don't give up easily, and don't give up before you've given it your absolutely best effort.

John said that people growing up today don't seem to have been taught how to work. He's not alone in that assessment. Earlier this year the same sentiment was the main thrust of a broadcast feature on National Public Radio.

John attended the one-room schoolhouse that sits adjacent to and overlooks his farm. He loved playing softball and that's how he met his wife Betty. During a softball competition in high school, Betty played second base for the other team.

He said he was taken by her, and finally got up the nerve to ask her to the prom.

Betty went on to college and became a nurse. She retired 12 years ago, but has continued working part time as a supervisor at Washington County Hospital in Hagerstown.

John said he has been lucky in life, because by staying involved he's been able to keep up with new things coming along (he was one of the first to raise soybeans and no-till corn), and by maintaining a steady work ethic and focusing on becoming debt free, they've been able to take advantage of opportunities that have allowed them to continue farming.

That's the way he and David said they intend to continue, farming day by day, and with an eye and ear to the future.



Walking along the farm lane of the family Misty Meadow Farm, Jenny Herbst holds a Labrador puppy, "Holly," while sister Kimberly looks on.

**NEED SOMEONE WHO
CAN FILL THE SHOES?**

Try A Help Wanted Ad
In Classified.

Phone: 717-394-3047 or 717-626-1164