



OPINION

Farmers Need To Know The Real Market Value Of Their Products

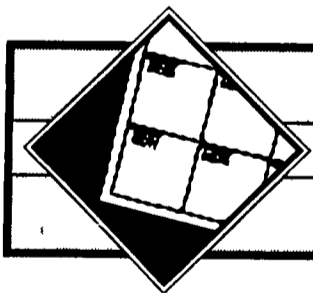
Since most producers of agricultural products are in the position of being "price takers" rather than setting their own prices, it is especially important that they have the best information possible on the actual market value of their products. Often market prices are published by the marketer to the best advantage of the buyer. Or the price for the livestock or produce to the farmer is not known until it is partly processed and in the distribution chain before a price is set. In this case, the farmer has no recourse if the price is not satisfactory.

In this day of low commodity prices and tight markets, the producers have little time to play guessing games about where to market their products. Legislation that would provide a price reporting system that supplies timely, accurate data on what packers are paying would remove much of the guess work producers have to go through in selling their products. The reason we call for legislation is that we already have a system of market reporting to be done by USDA, but the job is not being done. With funding cuts, the time and scope of unbiased market price reporting has become very limited. In addition, the packers don't want the farmers to know what they are paying.

Since an increasing number of livestock, both beef and pork, are sold under some form of contract, it is extremely important that information related to volume, prices paid, and the terms of these contracts be reported in an accurate and timely fashion. At the same time, most of these contracts are linked to cash prices, so we need accurate and timely reporting of cash prices as well.

Producers really need to know the procurement costs for the packer rather than just the open market price being paid on a particular day. Since fewer and fewer animals are being bought on the open market system, plant procurement costs would give producers a much better idea what the actual value of their animals are to the packing plant.

This all boils down to the fact that farmers should have access to competitive markets for price discovery that accurately determines the value of their products. They also need a reporting system that leads to the development of a better farm-to-retail price series. Many producers felt cheated by the prices they were receiving in relation to the retail price being reported by USDA. And rightly so. But the fact is that no one actually knows what the real price spread was during this time when we saw such low prices at the farm gate. But it is obvious that if a better formula were developed, producers, processors, and consumers would benefit from having information that more accurately shows the farm-to-retail spread in prices.



❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, May 15

Sunday, May 16

6th Annual Manor FFA Benefit Horse Show, Columbia Riding Club, 9 a.m.

Monday, May 17

Natural Landscapes and Habitat Walk, Bruce Grimes and Geoffrey Kaiser's woodland garden, and Sanwil Nursery, 5 p.m.

Tuesday, May 18

Twin Valley FFA Banquet, Sunny Crest Smorgasbord, Morgantown, 6:30 p.m.

Farm Estate Planning Workshop, Wellsboro Courthouse, Wellsboro, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Penn Jersey Extension Partnership Pond Management Workshop, UGI Auditorium, Bethlehem, 7 p.m.-10 p.m., also May 26.

Wednesday, May 19

Scouting Arthropod Pests On

Woody Ornamentals, Charles Witman Nursery/Landscape, York, 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Eastern Member Relations Conference, Pa. Council of Cooperatives, Radison Hotel, Harrisburg, thru May 21.

Crop Walk, Jeff Werner Farm, Lickdale, 10 a.m.

Crop Walk, Glen Krall Farm, North Cornwall, 1 p.m.

Penn Jersey Extension Partnership Pond Management Workshop, Sussex County Farm and Horse Show, Augusta, N.J., 7 p.m.-10 p.m., also May 25.

Thursday, May 20

Woodlot In the Works Tour, Hatch Run Conservation Demonstration Area, North Warren, 5:30 p.m.

Friday, May 21

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Now Is The Time By John Schwartz

Lancaster County
Agricultural Agent

Kathy Heil, Lancaster County Executive Director of the Farm Service Agency, reminds all dairy farmers that May 21 is the last day to apply for their share of payment under the Dairy Market Loss Assistance Program. Each farm operation producing milk in the fourth quarter of 1998 may apply. Farmers may use the higher of the 1997 or 1998 milk production, up to 2.6 million pounds, to determine actual payments.

United States Department of Agriculture estimates a payment of 18 to 20 cents per hundredweight will be made to qualified dairy farmers. To sign up the producer will need to provide the number of pounds of milk they produced. Payments will be made about three weeks after the end of the sign up period. Contact your local Farm Service Agency office before May 21 to process your application to this program.=20

To Understand Dry Weather

While it may be a little early to call the past period of little rain a drought, it may have been dry enough that herbicides may not work. Dry weather may affect the performance of both soil applied and post emergence herbicides.

According to Robert Anderson, Lancaster County Extension Agronomy Agent, all soil applied herbicides require some rain to activate them. In general, a minimum of one half inch of rainfall should occur within 7 to 10 days after the herbicide application or weeds may emerge without being controlled by the herbicide.

Less mobile herbicides like Prowl, Atrazine, Scepter and deeper germinating weeds like nutsedge will require more rainfall to be effective. When rain is delayed beyond the 7 to 10 day period, herbicide performance may be enhanced and small germinating weeds may be removed with a soil mixing operation.

Two good options to mix the herbicide into the surface layer of the soil are the rotary hoe or spike tooth harrow. The optimum time for this is when the weeds are just breaking through the soil surface and the corn is less than 5 inches tall or soybeans should be just past full emergence.

If dry weather continues, post applied herbicides may not work either. Weeds under dry conditions are not actively growing, making them harder to kill. This may be the year to get the old cultivator out and make sure it is in working condition so when the time comes you are ready.

To Produce High Quality Alfalfa

Producing high quality alfalfa at home means the dairy farmer

may reduce the purchase of off farm feeds. Studies in Pennsylvania over many years have shown that one way to maximize the quality of alfalfa hay is to harvest early. According to Robert Anderson, Lancaster County Extension Agronomy Agent, deciding when to harvest is difficult, especially for the first cutting of the year. Other farming operations, like planting corn, often interfere with the first alfalfa harvest.

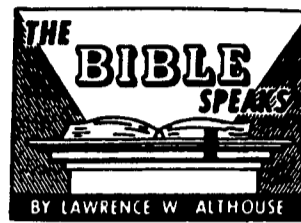
Research has shown that one way to determine the optimum time to harvest the first cutting of alfalfa each year is by calculating the number of growing degree days (GDD) accumulated beginning on April 1.

The GDD which works best is base 41 degrees. GDD is

calculated by adding the high and low temperature for each day and then dividing by two to calculate the average temperature for the day. From the average you subtract 41. The answer is the number of GDD base 41 for that day. By adding together each day's GDD you obtain the season's total.

Research has shown when the season total reaches 700, alfalfa will be near its maximum feeding value. Local weather data for Lancaster County shows that over the last 12 years, the earliest 700 GDD was reached was May 13, 1991 and the latest was May 21, 1989. The average date was reached between May 16 and 17.

Feather Prof.'s Footnote: "Businesses do not succeed, people do."



A FRIEND OF JESUS

May 16, 1999

Background Scripture:

John 15:1-17

Devotional Reading:

Job 23:1-12

I attended a memorial service for a former neighbor. The man had garnered many titles and honors during his life, but, said the minister, this man chose to be known simply as "a friend of Jesus." That said it all.

In those last days of his earthly ministry, Jesus paid his disciples the highest of compliments: "No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (15:15).

We use the term "friend" so variably and widely that it may not necessarily convey all that we mean by it. When Jesus speaks of his disciples as "friends," he denotes a much firmer, deeper relationship. It is a friendship of mutual love, respect and service. A friend is someone upon whom you can depend when you need them.

Jesus chose an analogy from the Old Testament to describe his kind of friendship. In Ps. 80:8-16, Jer. 2:21, Ezek. 5:1-8; 19:10-14 and Isa. 5:1-7, Israel is identified as God's tender vine that he plants and nourishes. Jesus uses the same analogy in the parable of the vineyard in Mk. 12:1-12 (also Matt. 21:33-46; Lk. 20:9-19). In John 15, Jesus has carried this analogy one step further: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-dresser" (15:1).

'I AM THE VINE'

He links the relationship between God and himself with that of his friends: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (15:5). Jesus' discourse on himself as "the true vine" and his disciples as the "branches" is an artistic rather than scientific description of the Christian's mystical relationship. Several key words are used repeatedly like a weaver using different strands in a tapestry. The allusion "branches" occurs five times, bearing "fruit" seven times and "abide"/"abiding" 11 times.

Obviously the relationship between God the "vine-dresser," Christ the "true vine," and his disciples, the "branches," is a very close and deep one. Just as a vine is a living thing that grows and develops, so there is a living, growing connection between all three. John uses terms which have usually been translated into English as "abide" and "abiding" — terms

not much used anymore. The only times I can remember using it is in reading the scripture or singing "Abide With Me."

My dictionary says that it can mean any of the following: to remain, continue, stay, dwell, reside, continue in a particular condition, attitude, relationship, wait for, endure, sustain, put up with, tolerate, stand, accept without opposition. The Jerusalem Bible renders "abide" as "Make your home in me." Moffet: "remain." NEB: "Dwell." Living Bible: "live in me" and "stay in me." TCNT: "remain united to me." Phillips: "You must go on growing in me" and "share my life." ABUV: "continue." Knox: "if you do not live on in me." Wms: "remain in union." All of these indicate the very closest of relationships between Christ and his disciples, as well as between Christ and the Father.

BE FRUITFUL

This relationship, however, is not just something for us to enjoy. As with real branches of a vine, it is expected by both the vine-dresser and the vine that we will bear fruit. "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (15:4). Bearing fruit is not an optional activity for the branch: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples." Fruit, not words, creeds, or declarations, is the proof of discipleship.

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (10). And the commandment? "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

This passage is both inspiring and challenging. When we examine our relationship with Christ, we must ask ourselves if this relationship is that of a true friend or merely an acquaintance. As someone has put it, "A friend is one who comes in when the whole world has gone out." That's the friendship that Christ offers to us and asks of us. Acquaintanceship is not nearly enough.

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