

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Food Policy As Political 'Weapon'

Last week we reported in the paper about several forecasts made by Bob Utterback, Utterback Marketing Services, New Richmond, Ind., ag marketing adviser for Farm Journal Magazine.

For corn and soybean growers who believe ag exports are key to profitability, the good news is that China is a big player now, wanting more grain to feed their expanding livestock industry. Demand for meat protein in China climbs as the country becomes even more "westernized." They need grain, so they'll certainly want to import more because of the recent World Trade Organization agreements and favored trade status.

But there's one caveat: our government's old ways of doing things.

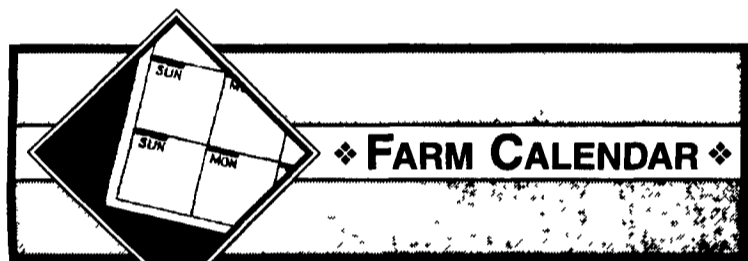
Problem is, U.S. grain producers can become too dependent on those markets, much like we did with pork exports before the Asian financial crisis and before we decided to cut back on loans to an ever-floundering Russia (which used to import a lot of chicken from us).

In the past, when Russia did something to upset our government, we simply cut back grain exports, according to Utterback. Would we do the same with China, as soon as they did something our government disagreed with?

Where, then, would that leave U.S. producers who need to market that grain?

Brings up some interesting questions.

If the U.S. continues to use food policy as an international diplomatic "weapon," as Utterback contends, our own producers are not being served very well, are they?



Saturday, February 3
Pa. State Rabbit Breeders' Association Convention, Lebanon Expo Center, Lebanon, thru Feb. 4.

Ephrata Area Young Farmers Banquet, Mt. Airy Fire Hall, 6:30 p.m.

Commercial Greenhouse Operators' Meeting, Comfort Inn, Altoona, Duncansville.

Well-Plugging Program, Sugar Grove Free Library, Sugar Grove, 7 p.m.

Sunday, February 4
36th Annual Shade Tree Symposium, Host Conference Center, Lancaster, thru Feb. 6.

Monday, February 5
Farm Computerized Accounting Workshop, Adams County extension office, Feb. 7, 9, and 12.

Building A Farmers' Market Business Workshop, Owego Treadway Inn, Owego, N.Y., also Feb. 6.

Tuesday, February 6
Pennsylvania Young Farmer Association Conference, Four Points Sheraton, Greensburg, thru Feb. 8.

Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Conference, Penn Stater Conference Center, University Park, thru Feb. 8.

Ephrata Area Young Farmers pesticide meeting, Lincoln Farm Smorgasbord, 6:45 p.m.

Keystone Pork Congress, Lebanon Valley Convention Center, Lebanon Fairgrounds, 8 a.m.

Calf Feeder School, Walker Township Building, Zion, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Northeast Vegetable Growers' Meeting, Thompson's Dairy Bar, Clarks Summit, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

Crop Records Seminar, Stoll Center, Wysox, 11 a.m.-noon.

Feeder School for Clinton, Centre counties, Walker Township Building, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Estate Planning For Farmers, Mercer County extension office, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Commercial Greenhouse Operators' Meeting, Comfort Inn, Altoona, Duncansville.

Well-Plugging Program, Sugar Grove Free Library, Sugar Grove, 7 p.m.

Forest Landowner Workshop, Dauphin County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, Dauphin, 6:30 p.m.

Pa. DHIA Awards Banquet, Days Inn Penn State, 5:30 p.m.

NCC Computer Training, Townsend Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, 7 p.m.-9 p.m.

Wednesday, February 7
Five-Acre Corn Club and Soybean Club Luncheon, Lebanon Valley Expo Center, noon.

2001 Southwest Beef Management Workshop 2, Cedarbrook Golf Course, Belle Vernon.

Ohio Fruit and Vegetable Growers Congress and Ohio Roadside Marketing Conference, Toledo, Ohio, thru Feb. 9.

Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Conference, Penn State Conference Center, University Park, thru Feb. 8.

Venango County Crops Night, Venango extension office, Franklin, 7 p.m.-9 p.m.

Blue Ball National Bank Farm Seminar, Blue Ball Fire Hall, 9:45 a.m.-3 p.m.

NCC Farmer Breakfast Meeting, ChesDel Diner, 7:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m.

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Now Is The Time

By John Schwartz

Lancaster County Agricultural Agent

To Look At

Changes In Agriculture

For most of the past 50 years, agriculture has been separated from the consumer and the marketplace.

It has been focused more on production than on profitability and thus supported by government. New farm policy is being directed at farmers being more responsive to consumers and markets. Agriculture is being deregulated. It is being separated from government management and support.

According to Dr. Joyce Cacho, Rabobank International, agriculture is no longer about a cheap food policy but a commercial food industry that has to stand on its own. Farmers must manage their farms as businesses for which there will be fewer rescues during periods of excess produc-

tion and/or low prices. This is causing consolidated, large production systems to be developed so farmers will have the needed control and scale that consumers, markets, and capital expect.

Agriculture is moving from a food supply driven to a demand and market driven economy. Accordingly, food must be the high quality and value consumers expect. This means food production must be controlled from farm gate to table.

According to experts at Rabobank, this does not suggest a few large firms owning production from farm to table, but it does mean production has to be more coordinated and monitored throughout the production cycle. This means production of food must be organized into strategic alliances, partnerships, or systems.

To Adjust To

Changes In Agriculture

There is a lot of interest in preserving the farmer. The next farm bill will have a big impact on the future structure of American agriculture.

Based on consolidations that are taking place in agriculture, many experts believe farmers smaller will become larger or smaller and creative. As the book "Who Moved My Cheese" states: our cheese is being moved and we must find new cheese if our farm business is to survive. The book is about change and how to respond to change.

Dr. David Kohl, Virginia Tech, stated this week in Lancaster, if we eliminate government payments, we will eliminate mid-size farms (farms with \$50,000 to \$250,000 in gross receipts) in the U.S. Farmers, through their organizations, will need to commu-

nicate to the public the impact farm policy will have on farm size.

Farmers will need to decide what type of farm they will operate in the future. To be small and creative will require different attitudes than becoming larger.

Regardless of the size, farmers will be facing more paperwork as consumers demand more information on how their food is being produced and what it contains. We need to be creative in how we add value to products.

Now is the time to learn about strategic planning and start doing it for your farm business.

To Understand

Trends In Agriculture

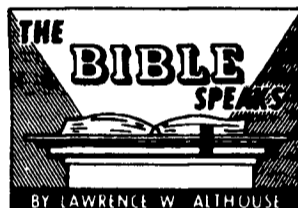
Dr. David Kohl, Virginia Tech, presented several seminars in Lancaster this week.

He made many interesting observations and how they will affect farmers.

In order to have a strong agricultural industry, you need the following: good soils, adequate water, and competent people; infrastructure and technology adaptation; political stability; financial stability; and market accessibility.

One point he made under political stability is you need favorable local regulations that allow farmers to grow their businesses. Also you need to grow your business annually by 10 to 15 percent in gross receipts or 5 to 7 percent in net receipts. The important thing to remember is the world is changing and farmers must change also.

Feather Prof's Footnote: "The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will."



GRASPING WHAT HE SAYS

Background Scripture:
Luke 18:15 through 19:10.
Devotional Reading:
Matthew 10:34-39.

What an advantage we have over "the twelve," the first disciples of Jesus! We have more than two thousand years and billions of written and spoken words to help us understand what Jesus is teaching us with what he said and did. Yet, for all of that, do we really grasp the teachings of Jesus?

In Luke 18:31-34, Jesus assembles "the twelve" and tells them that he and they are going to Jerusalem where death and resurrection await him. "But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said." The reason they did not "grasp what was said" is that it was so diametrically different from what they expected of the messiah.

In time, they learned what all of us must learn: anyone who takes Jesus seriously must be constantly prepared to be confounded by him.

They experienced this, not only in Jerusalem, but on the way, too. Luke 18 and 19 are full of surprises. In 18:9-14, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, he totally redefines the meaning of real piety (the Pharisee wasn't, but the tax collector was!).

In 18:15-17, as people were bringing "infants to him that he might touch them," he surprised them again: "Let the children come to me... for to such be-

longs the kingdom of God."

In 18:18-30, his encounter with the "rich ruler" to whom he issues the challenge to "Come, follow me," presents a revolutionary interpretation of discipleship.

Who Is Important?

Then, on the way to Jerusalem, Luke 18:35-43, Jesus demonstrates to his disciples just whom they ought to regard as "important." A blind beggar cries out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Told to shut up, the man only cried the louder and to everyone's astonishment, Jesus stopped and restored the man's sight.

A nice thing to do, we might say, but wouldn't it have been better if Jesus had wanted to heal someone more important? By his action, Jesus challenged them to see this man in a radically new light.

Then, just in case they didn't grasp his teaching, he did it again as he entered Jericho. Here, it was someone at the very bottom of the social ladder: a rich chief tax collector. Because they worked for their Roman oppressors and became rich while doing so, they were the ultimate swine of society. We can hardly appreciate their sense of shock and outrage when Jesus went with him to his house. What could have been more galling than to hear him say to the hated tax collector: "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and save the lost."

Well, of course, Jesus came to "seek and save the lost," but shouldn't he be more judicious in terms of whom he includes in "the lost?" Surely the kingdom of heaven or even our church — is no place for people of bad reputation. If we deem someone despicable, surely Jesus cannot want that person in his domain?

Sinners Transformed

In this incident with Zacchaeus, Jesus radically redefines

the meaning of discipleship. We do not become his disciples by saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe," but by letting Jesus transform our lives as he did the life of Zacchaeus.

He stood up and told Jesus: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restored it fourfold."

Zacchaeus did not deny his sins and he was not looking for cheap grace. Yes, he had become wealthy on his share of the taxes he gathered, so now he would give half of his wealth to the poor. Nor did he deny that he had cheated some, but he promised to repay them fourfold what he had taken from them.

The tax collector of Jericho truly grasped what following Jesus meant. It was not enough to say, "I'm sorry," but "This is what I'm going to do because I'm sorry." Grasping the meaning of Jesus' teachings means saying "yes" to his challenge in the most active, positive way.

When Jesus told Zacchaeus that "I must stay at your house today... when they saw it, all murmured, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'"

But Jesus also had a radically different concept of who are the sinners. As the comic strip character "Pogo" once observed, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!", so Jesus teaches us, if we will grasp it, that he came to "seek and save the lost" — and that is us. All of us!

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