

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Corporate Farms?

Environmentalists and anti-agriculturists are providing a lot of heat to township planning committees regarding their so-called worries about "corporations taking over agriculture."

The idea that corporations are building complexes so that shareholders can reap easy money simply isn't true.

We point to a study, extracted from Country Focus and the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, and reprinted in the December 2001 PennAg Journal.

"Are Corporate Farms Taking Over Pennsylvania?" points to the ensuing debate: are "corporate farms" either "good" or "bad" for ag and the environment? Do townships view large-scale agriculture as foe or friend?

Bill Adams, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's director of natural resources, looked at 1997 Federal Census of Agriculture statistics. Classifying operations with at least \$1,000 in ag sales as farming operations, the Census Bureau surveyed 45,457 ag operations in Pennsylvania covering 7.1 million acres of farmland. Those surveyed were asked to identify their operations as individual or family (sole proprietorship), partnership, corporation, or other (trust, cooperative, or estate).

A total of 40,176 respondents controlling 5.6 million acres of farmland listed themselves as "individual or family operations." Another 3,957 respondents, according to the Farm Bureau, controlling 1.1 million acres classified themselves as partnerships. The "other category" was listed by 183 respondents with 47,727 acres.

Those who listed themselves as corporations accounted for 1,141 respondents. Of this number, 1,024 with 318,555 acres of farmland were part of "family-held" corporations. The remaining 117 operations controlling 18,870 acres described themselves as "other than family held" corporations.

Of these 117 operations, according to Farm Bureau, only seven listed having more than 10 stockholders and the remaining 110 indicated they had 10 or fewer stockholders.

Farm Bureau's conclusion: the nonfamily held corporations accounted for less than one quarter of one percent of the farmers in Pennsylvania, according to census figures.

The 1997 Census was compared to the 1978 Census. In 1978, there was a total of 909 farming corporations. That amounted to an increase of 232 corporate farm operations, 10 more per year, during a 20-year span, "hardly evidence of a large shift toward corporate farms here in Pennsylvania," Adams noted.

It's too bad that critics of large-scale, environmentally friendly farm enterprises don't see the facts. Ag is always the easy target, and targeted far too many times.



**Now Is
The Time**
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County
Extension Director

To Be Aware Of New Research On Impact Of Bt Corn On Monarch Butterflies

Bt corn is one of several genetically engineered crops to come on to the market in the last few years. These crops have special properties that make them especially useful for specific purposes.

Bt corn offers the ability to control corn borer and other pests without the use of applied pesticides, since this crop produces its own control agent. The future usefulness of this crop was called into question in 1999 when a small experiment indicated the caterpillars of Monarch Butterflies were harmed when they were forced to feed on milkweed leaves heavily dusted with pollen from Bt corn.

Now new research conducted by a group of scientists coordinated by the Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/USDA indicates there is no significant risk to monarch butterflies from environmental exposure to Bt corn. This research was recently published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

The concern focused on the pollen of Bt corn because it, like any corn

pollen, can blow onto milkweed leaves, which are the exclusive diet of monarch caterpillars.

This recent research needed to answer two major questions to determine whether there was any actual risk to monarch caterpillars from the Bt pollen. The questions were how much Bt corn pollen does it take before there are any toxic effects on caterpillars and what is the likelihood that caterpillars might be exposed to that much pollen?

The studies in this project showed that monarch caterpillars have to be exposed to pollen levels greater than 1,000 grains/cm² to show toxic effects. Although caterpillars were found to be present on milkweed during the one to two weeks that pollen is shed by corn, corn pollen levels on milkweed leaves were found to average only about 170 pollen grains/cm² in corn fields.

Reports from several field studies show concentrations much lower than this critical level even within the cornfield. In Maryland, the highest level of pollen deposition was inside and at the edge of the corn field, where pollen was found at about 50 grains/cm². In the Nebraska study, pollen deposition ranged from 6 grains/cm² at the field edge to less than 1 grain/cm² beyond 10 meters. Samples collected from fields in Ontario immediately following the period of peak pollen shed showed pollen concentrations averaged 78 grains at the field edge.

This new research demonstrates that in actual practice in the field, the Bt corn is not a threat to the Monarch butterfly. This is good news since the earlier conclusion raised questions about the usefulness of this specific technology and also about unexpected side effects of genetic engineering in general.

To Continue To Conserve Water

On Dec. 5, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary David E. Hess announced that 62 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties are now under a drought declaration as conditions continue to worsen despite recent rain. Thirty-one counties are now under a drought warning and 31 counties are under a drought watch.

A drought watch is the first of the three drought stages under the state's

drought-operating plan. It calls for a voluntary 5-percent reduction of nonessential water use. A drought warning, the second stage, calls for a 10-percent to 15-percent voluntary reduction in water consumption; and a drought emergency, the third and most severe stage, imposes mandatory restrictions on water use. The drought emergency requires a declaration by Gov. Schweiker followed by action by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council.

"Groundwater levels are continuing to decline when they would normally be increasing," Hess said. "Now we're seeing streamflows dropping rapidly, reaching record-low levels in some cases, particularly in the southcentral and eastern portions of the state."

"We need significantly above-normal precipitation over an extended period of time in order for conditions to improve," Hess said. "It took several months to reach this point, and it may take several months to recover."

Twenty-two counties that previously were on the drought watch list were added to the drought warning list. They are Bedford, Berks, Bucks, Carbon, Columbia, Delaware, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lehigh, Mifflin, Monroe, Montgomery, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Philadelphia, Pike, Schuylkill, Snyder, Union, and Wayne.

Seven counties — Fayette, Greene, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Somerset, Susquehanna, and Wyoming — are being added to the drought watch list which now totals 31 counties.

To Attend National No-Till Conference

The 10th Annual National No-Tillage Conference will be Jan. 9-12 in St. Louis, Mo. For details about the conference, check out the extensive program online at the following Website: www.lesspub.com/nntc. An educational program especially for spouses is offered.

The Mid-Atlantic No Till Conference is coordinating bus transportation from State College to the conference. For more information, call NRCS State Agronomist Joel Myers at (717) 237-2220.

Quote Of The Week:
"It is a recession when your neighbor loses his job; it's a depression when you lose your own."
— Harry S. Truman

❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, December 15
Sunday, December 16
BCIA Consignment Bull and Heifer Sale, Blackstone, Va., (540) 231-9159.
Monday, December 17
Corn Silage Clinic, Clarion County Extension, Days Inn, Meadville, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Also Dec. 18 at Mt. View Inn, Greensburg.
Pesticide Update, Octoraro Young Farmers Assoc., Vo-

Ag Dept., Octoraro High School, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, December 18
OSU Ohio Regional Agronomy School, Bavarian Haus, Dresler, Ohio, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. (419) 592-0806, also Dec. 19 and 20 at other locations.
Corn Silage Clinic, Mt. View Inn, Greensburg, Clarion County Extension, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
4-H Tractor Safety Club, Lebanon County Ag Center, 7:30-8:30 p.m.
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❖ FARM FORUM ❖

Editor:
I have a suggestion to make I think you should print on your front page: "Farmers — World's Most Important People," because not a single person can live without food.
Allen R. Popjoy
Downington

Editor:
The environmental movement is demanding, yet again, that we ban atrazine. But atrazine, an herbicide, is one of the safest farm chemicals ever discovered and one of the keys to the

long-term sustainability of human society.
Amazingly, despite all this, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) just issued a skewed report that may be a prelude to an severely restricting atrazine use.
What's going on here?
I recently heard a senior EPA staffer utter that old bromide, "If we're being criticized from both sides, we're probably making the right decisions."
But let's suppose that one side
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THE BIBLE SPEAKS

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

GUESS WHO'S COMING!

Background Scripture:
Isaiah 40:1-11.
Devotional Reading:
Isaiah 40:25-31.

Back in those days when there was only radio, we listened intently to the voices and our minds supplied the mental images. Similarly, in Isaiah 40:1-11, we read what is said, but there is no description of the time, place, or participants. There are only voices.

Some scholars believe that the scene is that of a familiar biblical image, the Heavenly Council. Others believe that it is an assembly of prophets. Perhaps further descriptive detail has been withheld so that we may concentrate on the message.

There are four distinct voices. The message of the first voice (40:1,2) is one of grace: "comfort, comfort my people..." Those listening are commanded to proclaim the good news that the time of suffering and punishment are over. In 586 BC, the people of Judah were carried away into Babylonian exile. Separated geographically from the Temple,

they felt separated from their God. Through their exile they longed to return to Jerusalem and their God.

The emphasis here is not upon the "warfare," nor the "iniquity" of the people, nor what they have had to suffer; it is upon the fact that it is now "ended!"

The second voice is a call to preparation (vs.3-5): "In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert a highway for our God..." It is not so much that they will return to God, but that he is going to return to them; he will lead the way: "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together..."

Not For Comfort Only
While we all love the word of comfort, many of us are less responsive to the call of preparation. As George Adam Smith wrote: "We are satisfied with the personal comfort of our God; we are contented to be forgiven and — oh, mockery! — left alone. But the word of God will not leave us alone, and not for comfort only is it spoken."

The third voice (6-8) proclaims the steadfastness of God's word: "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field... The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever." It is hard for human beings to realize that our earthly lives are so transient. As we mature, however, we begin to realize that death is even more certain than taxes. As Reily of radio's "The Life of Riley" used to say: "What a revolting development this is!" So our hope is based solely upon the Lord, who, unlike his creatures, is eternal.

Most of us have lived long enough to know that, although we must learn to trust one another, in the

long run we cannot put our full trust in any human being(s) because all of us are flawed, make mistakes, fail and — yes — sin. We also learn that we cannot even depend solely upon ourselves. We fail ourselves as well as others. That is why we can comfortably trust only in God. As Robert Browning has put it, "Before man's First and after man's poet Last, God operated and will operate."

Everyone A Herald
The fourth voice is that of challenge (9-11): "Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings... say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!'" It is at this point that the audience is expanded to include all the people of Jerusalem. Everyone is to be a herald of the coming of the Lord and proclaim what that coming means.
Advent is not just a time for the pastors and preachers to proclaim the advent of God, but all of us.
The God who comes is characterized in two different ways: the victorious Ruler of the world — "Behold, the Lord God comes with might... — and as the compassionate Shepherd of his people — "He will feed his flock like a shepherd." Isaiah presents God in all his celestial grandeur and in all his saving grace as well. Both of these images are essential to our understand of the God who comes to us.
Because the Lord has so fully revealed himself in Jesus Christ, we no longer have to guess who is coming!

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