

# Lancaster Farming

## OPINION

### Foster Understanding

Last week, *Lancaster Farming* was privileged to attend a special Community Leaders Focus Group meeting at the Farm and Home Center in Lancaster.

The mission: isolate the issues critical to the environmental, economic, and community impacts of dairy farms.

More than a dozen producers and agri-industry representatives attended the meeting, where the issues of farm preservation, farm-to-consumer communication, and farm economic viability were discussed.

It was a fascinating meeting. Many of the comments about the realities of dairy farming in urban or rural areas were right-on.

Before the beginning of the focus group meeting (an effort spearheaded by Dr. Greg Hanson, Penn State Department of Ag Economics and Rural Sociology), the participants were asked to list the top issues on their minds.

*Lancaster Farming* placed these:

- Communities often show a lack of elected officials who have any involvement in, concern about, or even general knowledge of family-based large-scale agriculture.
- There is a general lack of long-term comprehensive planning regarding nonfarm development on land in townships and boroughs throughout the state.
- Too much legislation is occurring without considering the thoughts and well-being of farmers.
- What many participants agreed on:
  - To truly preserve farms, we must preserve farm profitability.
  - The public really would prefer open space, sometimes, and not a preserved, viable, ag security area-protected farm operation.
  - Farmers must be granted the freedom to be able to make a living, even if it involves some type of nonagricultural business at the farm. But if that farm's development rights have been purchased, township or borough supervisors must carefully regulate the size and scope of that business.
  - Public relations. Develop relationships with the media. Know who assigns stories to cover farm events. Make sure the reporter bringing agriculture to the consumer spotlight provides a fair, accurate, and balanced account. That's his or her job. When in doubt, call the newspaper or TV or radio station and talk to the managing editor if the coverage isn't fair and balanced.
  - Be proactive. Conduct your business as if you truly care about your neighbors and your farming community.



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

#### To Prevent Poultry Respiratory Disease

Dr. Gregory Martin, regional poultry agent, reminds us that while we are in the middle of winter our attention on poultry should turn to controlling respiratory diseases. This is in part because of the balance in the need of maintaining proper room temperatures in poultry facilities with the need for fresh air to exchange with room air to help exhaust water and carbon dioxide that stems from the birds normal conversion of feed to meat and eggs. This is where the art of poultry husbandry meets science, and it is a fine line to maintain the balance.

Martin suggests that the major poultry diseases to watch for in our area are avian influenza (AI) and infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT). These two diseases are somewhat similar in their clinical appearance, yet are uniquely identified by a blood test. Each is serious enough to remind us that a good biosecurity program is a must for all poultry producers.

AI has been isolated from both domestic and wild birds. It can be carried by a bird in its digestive tract and deposited for the next bird to pick it up. Only a small (the size of a dime) amount of droppings with this virus is enough to inoculate an entire house of poultry. Additionally, the

virus can be transmitted via the air just as seen with the human varieties of the flu with the virus invading the upper respiratory tract. A warm host is what is needed to keep the virus going, as it does not last long outside of birds. The strain of virus that affects birds is different from the one that causes human flu.

Routine blood testing is an important tool producers can use to manage risk. This method of surveillance aids in the control of AI as it helps identify flocks that are harboring the virus yet are not showing symptoms of the disease.

Infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT) is also an upper respiratory disease that producers must guard against. It is similar to AI in the fact that the birds show the same signs, such as coughing and gasping, and a marked drop in egg production with the disease. Birds that may recover from the sickness can be carriers, shedding the ILT virus for a long period of time. Vaccination for the disease can aid in its control.

Practicing biosecurity and good husbandry are the best methods producers can employ to control respiratory diseases. Biosecurity means taking precautions to avoid contact with any agent that may cause disease. A number of steps can be taken by producers to exclude disease.

First, limit the access to the poultry houses, including a wide perimeter surrounding the buildings. Any visitor to the poultry farm should use a gowning system that is similar to that seen in a hospital (disposable coveralls, boots, and hair cover).

Additionally producers should control access points in poultry housing against the intrusion from wild birds and rodents. These animals can be carriers of viruses. Another step is to use an "all-in-all-out" method of populating a poultry facility. Allow time for cleaning, disinfection, and downtime after the flock is shipped out. Finally, maintain optimal conditions within the house during the growth and production cycle. This would include periodic cleaning of the feed and watering systems and keeping floors as dry as possible.

If proper precautions are taken, the flock owner is providing the best possible defense against disease.

#### To Learn Operate Your Farm As A Business

The Lancaster Chamber Of Commerce will present a series of seminars on "The Farm Executive for

The 21st Century" Feb. 5-6. Dr. Danny Klinefelter, professor and extension economist at Texas A&M University, will lead the sessions for the Chamber's ninth annual Farm Business Management School. Klinefelter specializes in agriculture finance and management development at Texas A&M University.

The first day of the Farm School on Feb. 5, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Leola Family Restaurant, will focus on top producer strategies and best practices, value-added business plans, and attributes of successful family businesses. Brent Landis of the Chamber states this segment will focus on these ideas and practices that many farmers could implement. When looking at the strategies and best practices of top producers, the most successful operators tend to be innovators. Many of their ideas and practices are drawn from things they have seen in businesses outside of agriculture and then adapted to fit their situation.

The second component will focus on evaluating producer's value-added business plans. Low margins are causing an increasing number of producers to explore ways to gain more control over the market for their products. Many value-added activities involve alliances along the value chain or group efforts such as alliances or cooperative arrangements. Unfortunately, for every effort that succeeds, another fails. This session looks at some of the issues that need to be considered ahead of time.

The last segment of the Farm School will analyze the characteristics of successful family businesses. Most commercial farms involve more than one family member and frequently multiple generations. Some of the businesses and the relationships involved thrive, others are torn apart. The businesses that are successful over time tend to be heading off potential problems by addressing causes.

The Farm School includes an Agriculture Finance Breakfast and a second day geared to FFA and 4-H students in Lancaster County. If you wish to attend, call Brent Landis promptly at (717)-397-3531.

#### Quote Of The Week:

"I place economy among the first and most important republican virtues, and public debt as the greatest of the dangers to be feared."

— Thomas Jefferson, 1816

◆ FARM CALENDAR ◆

- Saturday, January 26**
- Pa. Meat Goat Producers' Conference, Iron Skillet Restaurant, Petro Shopping Center, Scranton, 9 a.m.-3:15 p.m.
  - Ohio District Saddle Horse Training, (740) 732-2381.
  - Beaver/Lawrence County Holstein annual meeting, Villa 2, Beaver Falls, 7:30 p.m.
  - Northeast Organic Farming Association's Winter Conference, Cook College, New Brunswick, N.J., 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
  - Clarion-Venango Forest Landowner's Conference, Behrend Campus, Penn State Erie, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

- Monday, January 28**
- Ohio Small Dairy Farm Update, Mrs. Yoder's Mt. Hope Restaurant, Dalton, Ohio, 9:30 a.m., (330) 264-8722.
  - Capitol Area Turf and Ornamental Winter School Program, Holiday Inn, Grantville, 8 a.m.-3:10 p.m., (717) 921-8803.
  - Adams County Corn Crops Clinic, York Springs Fire Hall, 8:30 a.m.-2:45 p.m., (717) 334-6271.
  - Beef Educational Meeting, Bernsville Grange, 5:30 p.m., (610) 378-1327.
  - Dairy Business: 10 Ways to Improve Profit Without Expand-

(Turn to Page A11)

◆ FARM FORUM ◆

**Editor:**  
Unfortunately, our prediction came true. During the fall of 2001, I predicted that milk prices paid to area dairy farmers would decline by \$4 per hundredweight (\$40 per gallon) during the upcoming months. Naturally, we were hoping our prediction would be wrong. However, when the average price paid to local dairy farmers for December's produced milk was announced at \$13.72 cents

per hundredweight (\$1.18 per gallon), this meant the pay price had plunged \$4.04 per hundredweight (\$35 per gallon) from September's pay price of \$17.76 per hundredweight. How many times have we seen whenever pay prices to dairy farmers reach a respectable level, the "powers to be" always find a way to crash the prices? This has happened over and over again. This continued roller-coaster (Turn to Page A11)

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

### IS GOD LISTENING?

**Background Scripture:** Isaiah 65:17-25.  
**Devotional Reading:** Revelation 21:1-7.4-9.

When terrorists crashed two domestic airliners into New York's World Trade Center and another into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., there were people who publicly demanded to know where God was in all of this evil tragedy. Writing to our local newspaper, a man said, "I've been praying for peace for longer than I can remember. Hasn't God been listening?"

Some people were shocked and outraged by this question, but not I. Better to honestly express our honest reactions than bury them. When people honestly take their protests to God, he can much better answer them. In Isaiah 63 and 64, the people of Israel have been asking questions such as this. Why does the Lord God of Israel remain silent?

Isaiah 65 begins with God's response to these complaints: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, 'Hear am I, hear am I.' (65:1). It was not God who was unresponsive, but the people of Israel. He answered them, but they didn't like or heed his answer.

That isn't too difficult for us to understand is it? We, too, pray for this and that, but we do not expect any answers and so we do not hear the answers he gives us.

**Prayer's Dominant Desire**  
One of the most influential books on prayer in my young life — and even today — was Harry Emerson Fosdick's "The Meaning of Prayer" (Association Press). Fosdick wrote a whole chapter on "Prayer As Prominent Desire."

Fifty years ago I underlined some of his most cogent arguments and still am guided by them today: "... many of the speeches addressed to God that we have called our prayers are not real prayers at all." Why? Because "They are not our dominant desires. They do not express the inward set and determination of our lives. ... Prayer that is not dominant desire is too weak to achieve anything."

I am not suggesting that our prayers will be answered by the power of our words or even our desire. God is not overcome by the power of our praying. We do not persuade him to change his mind because we are so intent. But our dominant desire opens our lives so that we may receive his power. We pray about a lot of things because we feel we ought to, not because we have an overwhelming passion for this or that cause. When we do have that dominant desire we give God the opportunity to work through us.

Fosdick also said that "Men are given to complaining of unanswered prayer, but the great disasters are due to answered prayers." Isn't that

what God is saying through the prophet in 65:12: "... because when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes, and chose what I did not delight in" (v. 12:a,b). Israel's doing "what was evil in my eyes" is evidence not that God didn't speak, but that he did and they refused to hear him.

**Anyone Else?**  
Someone once told a parable about a man who fell over a cliff in the dark and, after falling some distance, caught hold of a bush that broke his fall. Hanging on for dear life, the man called out: "Is there anyone up there?" Back came a voice saying, "Yes, this is God. Let go of the bush; you're close to the bottom." There was silence for a few moments until the man called out: "Uh... Is there anyone else up there?"

For those who listen and respond to God's word, Isaiah sees a new creation by God: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth... I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress" (65:17,19). As much as we want world peace, universal justice and the fulfillment of the destiny for which God has created us, so much more does God will it.

God has not, is not, and will not be unresponsive when his children truly seek him. "Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear" (65:24). Is God listening? Yes! Are you?

**Lancaster Farming**  
An Award-Winning Farm Newspaper

- Keystone Awards 1993, 1995
- PennAg Industries 1992
- PACD Media Award 1996
- Berks Ag-Business Council 2000
- Recognized for photo excellence throughout the years by the Northeast Farm Communicators

**Lancaster Farming**  
Established 1955  
Published Every Saturday  
Ephrata Review Building  
1 E. Main St.  
Ephrata, PA 17522  
—by—  
**Lancaster Farming, Inc.**  
A Steinman Enterprise  
William J. Burgess General Manager  
Andy Andrews, Editor  
Copyright 2002 by Lancaster Farming