

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Target The Tax Issue

Recently we received the excellent newsletter, Farm Economics, published by Penn State's College of Ag Sciences. For issue 6 in 2001, the article spoke about the "important issues facing Pennsylvania local governments." Timothy W. Kelsey, Penn State associate professor of agricultural economics, wrote the story.

What are the issues of most concern to local governments?

The top concern: need for local reform of school district taxes.

The survey was done by mail, sent in the year 2000 to 474 randomly selected Pennsylvania borough and township officials (there are 2,569 local governments in Pennsylvania, by the way).

Of those, 306 responded (an astonishing 65 percent response rate).

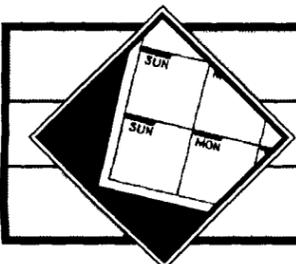
Sixty percent of the officials responding noted that reforming school taxes was a pressing need, coming out clearly on top. Half said reforming and administration of property taxation and assessment was a pressing need.

Relatively few officials thought that issues related to spending were pressing needs.

Another pressing need: preservation of open space and infrastructure issues. But that's another editorial.

The issue is before us, and has been for quite some time: making taxation fair. Why should a farmer making \$22,000 a year in taxable income pay a lot more tax for his 100 acres than a lawyer making \$500,000 on his half an acre? Shouldn't tax be based on income, rather than property?

This is an issue we hope the new national administration, and an upcoming state administration, addresses in a serious way. Now, in light of this recession, could be the best time.



❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, February 2
Pa. State Rabbit Breeders' Association, Lebanon Ag Center, also Feb. 3.
Farmer-to-Farmer Workshop, Ballston Spa near Saratoga Springs, N.Y., also Feb. 3.
Ephrata Area Young Farmers' Association Banquet, Mt. Airy Fire Hall, 6:30 p.m.
Equine Reproduction Short Course, Mercer County Cooperative Extension Center, 8:30 a.m.
Beaver-Lawrence Counties Annual Meeting, Holiday Inn, Beaver Falls, 7:30 p.m.
Lawrence County Sheep and Wool meeting, Liberty Grange, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

Sunday, February 3
Shade Tree Symposium, Lancaster Host Resort, thru Feb. 5, (215) 795-0411.
Fertilizer Institute, Marriott's Orlando World Center, Orlando, Fla., thru Feb. 6, (800) 621-0638.
Monday, February 4
Southeast Strawberry Expo and North American Berry Conference, Sheraton Imperial Hotel, Durham, N.C.
Octoraro Young Farmers meeting, Octoraro High School, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, February 5
Keystone Pork Expo, Lebanon Expo Center, 8 a.m., (610) 285-6519.

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❖ FARM FORUM ❖

Editor:
I spent a week this past fall visiting farms in Holland and the European Union headquarters in Brussels. As I had expected, we talked about high-profile issues such as food safety, mad cows, and genetically modified organisms. But the discussions I found most interesting were about policies that would save small farms and preserve the character of rural areas.

The current member countries of the European Union (EU) have almost eight million farms, four times as many as we have in the United States. As other countries join the EU, millions more farms will come under Common Agricultural

Policy. Should that policy demand that these farms "get big or get out," the path we have taken here, or should they try something else?

I think the answer depends on what you expect from a farmer. In the United States, our policies most often take a fairly narrow view of what a farmer does: plant and harvest crops, feed and care for livestock. Waves of new technology constantly make it possible for fewer people to do these vitally important tasks. Hence, we hear solutions to the farm income problem that would reduce the number of farmers. In short, we have too many farmers.

The Europeans I met took a

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Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Welcome New Horticulture Extension Specialist

Dr. Elsa Sanchez recently began employment as the new systems management horticulturist in the Department of Horticulture at Penn State. Her appointment is 60 percent extension and 40 percent teaching. The primary focus of the position is the development of horticultural crop production systems for smaller acreage or part-time producers. Sanchez will be developing programs concerning alternative or niche crops, production and management systems for small farms, and integrated crop management.

Sanchez earned a doctorate in horticulture at Washington State University and a master's degree in agricultural biology and a bachelor's in horticulture at New Mexico State University. She looks forward to addressing needs of the growers that farm smaller acreage of horticultural crops or farm part-time. Sanchez welcomes your suggestions on project and needs that you would like to see addressed. She can be reached at (814)-863-2433 or by e-mail at ess11@psu.edu.

To Prepare For Hiring From A Diverse Labor Pool

Dr. Judy Olian, dean of Penn State's Smeal College of Business and a leading expert in strategic human resources management, shares some revealing insights from

the 2000 U.S. census released last year.

The Census indicates that about 30.5 million of the 273 million residents in the U.S. are foreign-born. Of these, about 13.5 million entered the U.S. in the last decade. While new immigrants come to the U.S. with more education than in previous decades, about 32 percent do not complete high school (compared to 10 percent of U.S.-born students). In addition, immigrants will comprise more than a third of new entrants into the work force during the next decade.

Children of baby boomers, so-called Generation Y, are another source of growth in today's work force; however, these are increasingly children of low-income families (41 percent), and only 36 percent of this income group is likely to attend college.

Olian reports another very important statistic that will impact our future hiring is that many Americans, both new and more established immigrants, are members of non-English speaking households. From the 2000 U.S. Census, 45 million, or 16.5 percent, speak a language other than English at home, and 19.5 million, or 7.1 percent, speak English "less than very well."

In summary, there are fewer people attending college, there is more diversity in the work force, and an increasing percentage of the work force that is non-English speaking. Olian suggests this means employers must get into the business of educating. Escalation of skill requirements for even basic jobs and the increasing prevalence of non-English speaking residents will force employers to develop language, technical, and analytical skills wherever they find them even if that means becoming the provider of in-house education. And, to keep employees' skills current, to foster loyalty among trained workers, and to protect them against the predatory moves of competitors, employers will have to continuously update their employees' skills. To stay competitive, it will be ever more important that employers leverage diversity of every kind in the dominant category of growth in the work force. In order to utilize this talent in the labor pool, providing in-house education will be necessary.

To Install Water-Saving Devices In Your Home

The drought conditions in Pennsylvania continue to worsen as January failed to produce a significant amount of rainfall. It is imperative

that all of us evaluate where we can save water.

A good place to start is in our homes. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that most households use 80 gallons of water per person per day. About 75 percent of the total water usage occurs in the bathroom. Making a few plumbing changes there can cut water usage substantially without significantly changing our lifestyle. The place to start is with your toilet.

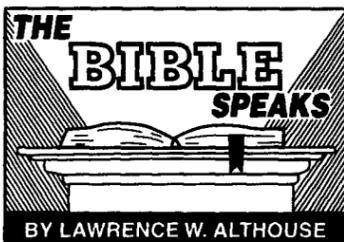
Close to forty percent of household daily water use gets flushed down the toilet. Conventional toilets use between 5-7 gallons of water per flush. More modern toilets, which are required in many current building codes, use about 3.5 gallons per flush. The most efficient ultra-low flush toilets use only 1.6 gallons per flush. Replacing a conventional toilet with an ultra-low flush toilet can save 88 gallons per day for a family of four. That adds up to a whopping 32,000 gallons per year.

If replacing your conventional toilet is not workable for you, another alternative is to retrofit the one you have. A simple retrofit is installing toilet dams, which cost around \$10 and are very simple and quick to install. Typically these devices are made of flexible stainless steel coated in plastic. Since they are flexed, they hold themselves in place in the tank. Properly installed dams can save one to two gallons per flush. Placing a glass or plastic jug in the tank can save water as well. Other devices on the market include the pop flush device and a mini flush device. These items cost around \$20 and save around two gallons per flush.

Another fixture in your bathroom that should be upgraded to a water-saving model is the showerhead. Conventional showerheads use 5-8 gallons per minute. Low-flow showerheads use 2.5 gallons per minute. Most of these fixtures use an aeration device to mix air with the water droplets, making it feel like there is more water coming from the shower head than there really is. In most cases you will hardly notice the difference, but this can save up to 55 gallons for every 10 minutes of showering. These devices are easily installed and cost from \$10-\$40. Check the flow rate on the device you are considering and make sure it is less than three gallons per minute for maximum savings.

Quote Of The Week:

"When you have an elephant by the hind legs and he is trying to run away, it is best to let him run."
— Abraham Lincoln



THE BIBLE SPEAKS
BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

RUNNING ON 'EMPTY'

Background Scripture: Ruth 1.
Devotional Reading: Psalms 8.

I realize that you may have little, if any, idea of who or what a Moabite is and therefore think that the story of Ruth, the Moabitess, is something quite foreign to your own life. Actually, no one knows the derivation of the terms "Moab" and "Moabite," but the problem is easily solved if you read "outsider" for "Moabite." Many of us know what it is to be an "outsider" or to have to deal with them.

The book of Ruth is not so much about "Moabites" as it is about "outsiders." Ruth was a woman of Moab, just one of a number of Israel's neighbors. The relationships with these neighbors was almost always one of suspicion, hostility, and often aggression.

Some of this hostility had to do with the fact that Israel worshiped Yahweh, while her neighbors worshiped a host of pagan deities — in Moab it was Chemosh and Ashtorchemosh, as well as crude fertility

gods and goddesses. Israel held them in disdain because the first Moabite was believed to be the fruit of an incestuous relationship between Lot, the nephew of Abraham, and Lot's own daughter.

Resident Aliens

So it is ironic that an Israelite, Elimelech, went to Moab with his wife, Naomi, to live there as resident aliens. Why? Verse 6 implies that Israel experienced a considerable famine. Whereas Elimelech's home, Bethlehem, was on the west side of the Dead Sea, the land of Moab was on the eastern shore of it, a well-watered and fertile highlands. Elimelech must have been driven to Moab by dire economic need. While in Moab, Elimelech and Naomi had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, who, sometime after the death of their father, married two Moabite girls, Ruth and Orpah.

The Book of Ruth opens with Naomi newly bereft of her sons. In five short verses we see a significant change in Naomi. Her name in Hebrew means "my pleasantness" and, given the devotion of her two Moabite daughters-in-law, we may assume that her name was indicative of her personality. But now, an outsider in a traditionally unfriendly land, having lost her husband and two sons, Naomi is bitter — and how could we blame her? First, famine drove her from her homeland to become a sojourner in a traditionally unfriendly land. Then she lost her husband and two sons.

Having learned that conditions in Israel were now improved, Naomi is determined to return to Bethlehem. When Ruth and Orpah insist that they accompany her, she says bitterly, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become

your husbands?" (1:11). Her words contrast sharply with the affectionate responses and sense of responsibility with which Orpah and Ruth respond. They were from Moab, but they were nevertheless good people.

A Stranger In Bethlehem

Eventually, Orpah returns to her parental home in Moab, but Ruth refuses to be dissuaded and accompanies Naomi to her ancestral home. Now the roles are reversed because, while Naomi was an Israelite sojourner in Moab, now it will be her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, who will be the stranger in Bethlehem. Naomi was instantly recognized by her Bethlehem friends and neighbors. "Is this Naomi?" they ask.

But she sets them straight: "Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara ("bitter"), for the Almighty had dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty" (1:20,21). While we can understand the emotions behind this bitter outburst, we know that Naomi is wrong. She has not returned empty to Bethlehem. With loyal and loving Ruth, Naomi is not and will not be "empty."

Many of us, perhaps like Naomi, have suffered one reversal or loss after another and come to the conclusion that God has made us or allowed us to become "empty." Often, it is only then that we discover that he has not left us empty but with a fullness that only grace can deliver and faith can receive.

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