

# Lancaster Farming

## OPINION

### What Our Thoughts Make It

Some financial analysts see the recession as short-lived and soon to be done with. Yet agricultural export companies continue to re-invent and re-market themselves.

Great news: in the Dec. 27 U.S. Agricultural Trade Update of the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. ag exports from January-October 2001 increased by \$1.8 billion over the same period in 2000 as high-value sales gained by \$1.7 billion. U.S. farm trade surplus through October was up by a cumulative \$1.5 billion.

Exports in October 2001 climbed by \$639 million from the previous month as shipments of soybeans, horses, cattle, and tree nuts jumped by significant amounts.

Hoard's Dairyman reported early last month that the value of dairy exports jumped 13.6 percent during fiscal year 2001 (October-September 2001) to \$1.132 billion. The most growth, according to Hoard's, was in the cheese category, which climbed to \$158 million (compared to \$134 million the year before).

Farm Bureau News, for the Jan. 7 issue, noted in big headlines that "Ag is the bright spot in a dim world economy." They report: "the value of U.S. agricultural exports is expected to grow for the third consecutive year, making agriculture the bright spot in the current world economy."

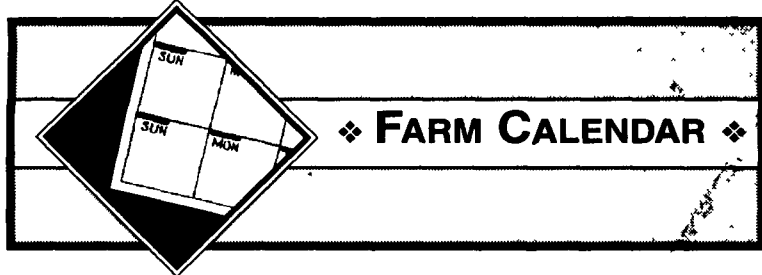
The Farm Bureau reports ERS information that show exports will grow 6.5 percent to \$57 billion in fiscal year 2002, which began on Oct. 1. Most of the gain, they note, will be seen in the major bulk commodities, including corn, wheat, soybeans, and cotton. And horticultural products, such as fruits and vegetables, are also projected to increase.

ERS reports that in fiscal year 2001, according to Farm Bureau, total exports of U.S. farm and food products grew to \$53 billion, a \$2.1 billion increase over fiscal year 2000. High-value consumer-oriented products sparked the increase with \$2.1 billion in additional exports.

Though the ERS's Ag Outlook report for January-February 2002 paints a "mixed picture for the farm and rural economy," mostly because of the recession, clearly exports are on the way up.

East Asian countries have tasted Western products, and want more. We don't think there's any turning back now — China and other countries want Western products more and more, and are willing to spend for them.

That kind of good news is often hard to come by. So the recession affects us — perhaps only if we let it.



### ◆ FARM CALENDAR ◆

#### Saturday, February 9

Dauphin County Crops Day, Upper Dauphin High School, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., (717) 921-8803.

New Castle County 4-H Winter Workshop on Vet Science, 9 a.m.-noon.

Southern Maryland Small Farmers Seminar, Prince George's County Extension, county office in Clinton, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., (410) 222-6759.

Delmarva Forestry Seminar, Polytech Adult Education Conference Center, Woodside, Del., 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., (302) 730-4000.

Introduction To Beekeeping Workshop, cooperative extension office in Wayne County, Courthouse, Honesdale, 9 a.m.-noon, (570) 253-5970, ext. 239.

#### Sunday, February 10

4-H Day, Lady Lions, Bryce Jordan Center, University Park, 2 p.m.

#### Monday, February 11

New York State Vegetable Conference, Holiday Inn and Convention Center, Liverpool, N.Y., thru Feb. 14.

Ohio State Extension, USDA program, Upper Valley Joint Vocational School, Piqua, (937) 498-7239.

Southeast Pennsylvania Grazing Conference, Solanco Fairgrounds, Quarryville, also Feb. 12, (717) 529-6644.

Poultry Health and Management Seminar, Kreider's Restaurant, Manheim, noon.

Midwest Young Farmers Begin-

ning Farming Safety Course, Middleburg High School, (570) 837-1171, ext. 119.

Ag Outlook Forums, Country Cupboard Restaurant, Lewisburg, Noon-3 p.m.; Feb. 12, Ramada Inn, Altoona, Noon-3 p.m.; Feb. 12, Four Points Sheraton, Cranberry Twp., 7 p.m.-9:30 p.m., 1 (800) 998-5557.

#### Tuesday, February 12

Forage Expo, Lebanon County Expo Center, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Cooperative Director and Leadership Conference, Nittany Lion Inn, thru Feb. 14.

Ohio, Michigan Grain Marketing Program, Ann Arbor, Mich., (419) 422-6106.

Nutrient Management and Sediment Control, Innovative Technology Forum, Holiday Inn, Grantville, thru Feb. 14, (717) 545-8878.

Spring Vegetable Grower's Meeting, Polk Township Fire Company, Kresgeville, 6:30 p.m.

Pa. Draft Horse Sale, Pa. Farm Show Building, Harrisburg, thru Feb. 13.

Northeast Fruit Growers Meeting, Iron Skillet Restaurant, Petro Shopping Center, Avoca, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Vegetable Production School, Cumberland County Cooperative Extension office, Carlisle, also Feb. 13.

Tilling the Soil of Opportunity, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Tuesday evenings Feb. 12-April 30, (570) 837-4252.

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

#### To Protect Your Hearing

Farms are noisy places with potentially damaging noise from tractors, other equipment, vacuum pumps, and even fans in the working environment every day. Dennis Murphy, Penn State professor of agricultural engineering, said farmers should protect their hearing before it's too late.

Murphy points out loud rock music is about 115 decibels. Noise on a farm ranges between 90 and 140 decibels, which is well above the 85-decibel limit at which industrial employers must provide hearing protection for workers.

"Consistent, repetitive exposure to high-decibel noise can damage hearing before you notice any change," Murphy said. "The farmer may think he's getting used to the noise, but in reality he already may have experienced a mild hearing loss."

Hearing loss, like many medical problems, does have warning signs. One warning is buzzing, whirring, or ringing in the ears, which can indicate a temporary hearing loss. Also if you listen to the radio or television at a volume that seems too loud for family or friends, you may have some hearing damage. Frequently asking people to speak up or the inability to follow conversations in a crowd can indicate hearing loss as well.

On farms, extremely high noise levels may seem normal, but Murphy said there's a quick way to tell if noise is at a dangerous level. "If you have to shout to be heard at a distance of about three feet, the noise is too loud," he explains. "Reduce the noise level or wear hearing protection."

Murphy said safety surveys have shown that farmers are aware of excessive noise hazards, but many opt not to wear ear protection. "It may be that farmers believe wearing them is inconvenient, unwieldy, or time-consuming," Murphy said. "Certainly it will be a change in routine, but better to wear protection today than hearing aids tomorrow."

Murphy said ear protection comes in two basic forms: muffs that fit over the ears (much like those worn at shooting ranges) and plugs that are worn inside the ear canal. Both types reduce noise by about 25 decibels. Both product types are carried in health and safety catalogs, sporting goods stores, or through licensed audiologists.

Muffs are more comfortable "if worn over a long period of time," Murphy said. "Still, their effectiveness can be compromised if you wear glasses or a hat. Ear plugs are less noticeable and fit into your pocket."

Disposable earplugs cost about \$1 while muffs cost from \$5-\$80. If you use plugs regularly, it may be more cost effective to buy reusable plugs or muffs, according to Murphy.

#### To Learn To Use The Futures Market To Manage Fluctuating Milk Prices

Fluctuating milk prices are a new challenge for dairy farmers, but using the futures market can help to stabilize income. Dairy experts in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences will offer several training classes on this topic in February.

"Dairy Risk Management Training: Learning How to Forward Contract/Hedge Milk in Pennsylvania" is a one-day workshop being taught in several locations around the state by Kenneth Bailey, associate professor of dairy markets and policy, and Sarah Roth, extension associate with Penn State's Dairy Alliance

program. AgChoice Farm Credit and Land O'Lakes Dairy Cooperative sponsor the training.

Bailey explains that the training helps dairy farmers lock in better milk prices, understand their milk market, and decipher their milk checks.

"In recent weeks, milk prices have fallen significantly due to a weak national economy and events surrounding September 11," Bailey said. "Dairy farmers who used the futures market prior to the September tragedy were able to protect their milk income against these sudden drops, and it's surprisingly easy once you understand the basics."

The training is very basic and participants do not have to be a math whiz to participate. Bailey points out this one-day class also is a good introduction for farmers planning to attend the USDA's Dairy Options Pilot Program later this year.

The six-hour training will address such topics as "Understanding Your Milk Check," "Basics of Forward Contracting," "Computing Your Basis," "Incorporating Risk Management Into Your Business Plan," and "Strategies and Market Outlook."

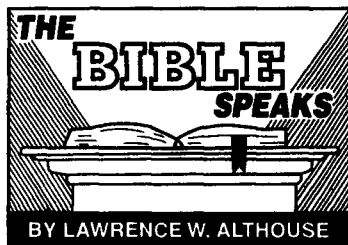
Training sessions will be limited to 20 participants, and a registration fee of \$10 will include lunch. All worksheets and materials will be provided, and the basis of the training will be a new Penn State manual on dairy risk management available on the Web at <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/ua359.html>.

The training is being offered Feb. 19 in State College. Contact Terry Maddox for more information at (814) 355-4897. The program will be repeated in Coudersport Feb. 20. Contact Jim Clark at (814) 274-8540. It is also set for Meadville Feb. 21. Contact George Wilcox at (814) 825-0900. This class will be presented in Myerstown Feb. 27. Contact Galen Kopp at (717) 270-4391.

#### Quote Of The Week:

"Agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, and navigation, the four pillars of our prosperity, are the most thriving when left most free to individual enterprise."

— Thomas Jefferson  
(First Annual Message to Congress, Dec. 8, 1801)



### MOABITE BLOOD

Background Scripture:  
Ruth 2 through 4.  
Devotional Reading:  
Psalms 126.

In Biblical days, people did not have surnames. The people of Bethlehem probably called Naomi's daughter-in-law "Ruth the Moabitess." We do not know the meaning of the word "Moab," but "Ruth" is derived from the same Hebrew root as "friend" or "companion." If that is so, then Ruth was very suitably named.

Normally, of the two words "Moabitess" and "friend," the former would be the most important: she was a foreigner. It would have been the same if she had been an Edomite, Ammonite, or Canaanite. Initially, ethnicity was believed to be more important than personality. Having the "right" blood or the "wrong" blood was very important. So Ruth was initially suspect because she was of Moabite blood.

To overcome that liability, Naomi played the "family" card. Too old to work herself, Naomi based their survival on kinship. As kin to Boaz, she hoped that Ruth would be allowed to glean in his fields. Gleaning was a

means of providing for those less fortunate, permitting them to gather what was left of the crop after harvesting.

#### The Moabite Woman

Boaz observed Ruth gleaning in his fields and asked his workmen to identify her. Note the answer that they gave him: "It is the Moabite maiden, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab" (2:6). His workmen say "the Moabite woman," not "a Moabite woman." She was the Moabite woman about whom the town was talking because of her loyalty to their kinswoman, Naomi.

Boaz is attracted to Ruth. Perhaps it is because of her loyalty to Naomi. Perhaps he was impressed by her pluck in subjecting herself to a backbreaking and perhaps dangerous task. ("Have I not charged the young men not to molest you?") Ruth is so incredulous at his invitation to glean exclusively in his fields that she asks: "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" Answers Boaz: "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me..." (2:11). So, Ruth's personality won out over her ethnicity. Although she has Moabite blood, she displayed the kind of loyalty, responsibility, and love that Israel's God asked of all Israelites.

#### David's Great Grandmother

Do we also see romance here? Whether it was in Naomi's mind from the time they returned to Bethlehem or occurred to her when Boaz shows interest in

Ruth, Naomi sees the possibility of an even deeper attraction on his part: "Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor" (3:3). When Boaz fell asleep on the threshing floor, Ruth was to quietly lie at his feet.

In the middle of the night when he awoke, Boaz is startled and Ruth says to him: "I am Ruth, your maidservant; spread your skirt over your maidservant, for you are next of kin" (3:9). Her invitation for him to spread his robe over her is an invitation to take her in marriage. This was Levirate marriage: the next of kin had the right and obligation to protect the property and honor of a kinsman who died, maintaining the family line (Lev. 25:25; Deut. 25:5,6). Despite her Moabite blood, Boaz married Ruth and she bore him a son, Obed, who would be the father of Jesse, the father of David the King.

Although Nehemiah and Ezra were pronouncing strong prohibitions against the marriage of Israelites and foreigners, the author of Ruth is bringing a different message to Israel. Ruth, a foreigner, is exemplary in her loyalty and love of her Israelite mother-in-law. Later, when David ascended the throne and became the model Israelite king, it was to be remembered that his great grandmother was a woman of Moabite blood.

### Lancaster Farming

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—by—

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### Lancaster Farming

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