

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Farm Bill And The Best 'Safety Net'

To put it mildly, it's difficult for producers in many parts of the country to decide what long- (or even short-) range plans to have for their business when the Farm Bill still hasn't been signed into law.

Some farm organizations can't agree what version is best. American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) recently noted they want the final bill by the end of this month. They oppose provisions in the Senate bill, including commodity payment limits of \$275,000 per farm family. (House version is \$550,000.) They also don't like a provision that would shift water regulation authority from states to the federal government. AFBF would rather have expanded voluntary conservation incentives to increase cost-sharing options for farmers.

The National Farmers Union (NFU), on the other hand, supports the Senate version, which provides, they say, a broader, more comprehensive safety net compared to the House version.

In the March 4 Farm Bureau News, pages 4-5 outline nicely what AFBF's priorities would be and compares the two versions. They should approve of some aspects of the Senate version, with its soybean loan rate reductions. They also are on the "same page" regarding payment limits (AFBF wants \$50,000 for PIC direct payments, \$75,000 for countercyclical payments, and \$150,000 for M/Gs/IDPs).

AFBF prefers a total payment limit of \$550,000, same as the House version, compared to the Senate's \$275,000.

Everybody believes that conservation incentive programs should continue.

A big area of the new Farm Bill proposals, under the Senate bill, contains a dairy title that would provide support for dairy producers in 12 northeast dairy states, including Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and others. The program would provide producers a payment whenever the monthly Class I (fluid milk) price falls below \$16.94 per hundredweight (CWT). This program is targeted to dairy farms with about 400 cows or less. The Senate bill would extend the dairy price support program at the current level of \$9.90 per CWT.

State Grange has noted that producers should be allowed to choose between the Dairy Compacts, which they believe promote stable milk prices, or the new direct payment program. Grange also backs a federal dairy support price of at least \$9.90 CWT.

NFU sees that the bill must provide an economic safety net that "provides realistic support for working farmers," according to a recent news release.

We agree. Even the Soil and Water Conservation Society recently released a report, which clearly notes the Senate bill favors more long-term, wide-ranging programs, with funding to conservation programs outstripping the House bill by about \$4 billion over 10 years.

What's keeping this thing from passing? Well, politics, as usual. So much is at stake, with the country now only pulling out of recession and commodity prices the lowest we've seen. Not to mention election-year turmoil, with all the candidates promising to solve constituent problems.

And remember, Europe still far "out-subsidizes" ag programs compared to the U.S. This continues to create a trade disadvantage for farmers here. And if trade remains a priority, producer/constituents want critical provisions met.

Lancaster Farming doesn't want to see the needs of farmers hampered, especially in these trying times. But we like the Senate version better, since we believe farmers would benefit in a variety of ways, not just on direct payments but on many other provisions. It's reasonable. They should sign it.



Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Apply Nitrogen To Small Grain

Dr. Elwood Hatley in the agronomy department suggests the rate and timing of spring-applied nitrogen depends on several factors.

The first factor is growth stage. If the plants are at growth stage 2 (main stem and one or two tillers) or less, apply the nitrogen as soon as plants start "greening-up." If the plants are past growth stage two, the nitrogen can be applied from "green-up" to growth stage 5 (early erect growth). Refer to the 2002 Agronomy Guide, page 73, for a description of growth stages. The 2002 agronomy guide is available on the Internet at <http://agguide.agronomy.psu.edu/>.

The nitrogen rate will depend on anticipated yield, previous crop yield, previous fertilizer amounts, and frequency and amount of manure applied. Each bushel of wheat grain produced will require 1.3 to 1.5 pounds of nitrogen. Estimating the amount that will be supplied by the soil is important. Excessive nitrogen applications effect profitability, increase disease pressures, increase lodging potential, decrease yields, and increase the potential for nitrogen leaching. Inadequate nitrogen also affects profitability since it will result in reduced yield.

One of the major factors affecting soil available nitrogen is frequency of manure applications. Research indicates that when fields are manured every one or two years, one should apply 0 to 30 pounds nitrogen per

acre; if applied every three to four years, one should apply 30 to 60 pounds nitrogen per acre; and when applied less frequently, one should apply 60 to 90 pounds nitrogen per acre.

Winter barley has less resistance to lodging than wheat; therefore, the nitrogen rates should be reduced accordingly. Keep the nitrogen rates between 45 and 60 pounds per acre when manure is not applied frequently to the field. When manure is frequently applied, use only 0 to 30 pounds nitrogen per acre.

To Scout Small Grain Fields For Weeds

A good vigorous stand of a small grain crop sometimes does not need any herbicide to get acceptable weed control. However, one needs to walk the fields to be able to see winter annual weeds that could be growing aggressively at this time of the year.

Shepherd's purse, henbit, chickweed, and mustard are common winter annuals that infest small grains. If these weeds are present and the field does not have a history of Canada thistle, then apply a postemergence product as soon as possible. Check in the 2002 agronomy guide for the list of recommended products and the suitable growth stages of the small grain when the products can be applied. For best control, these products should be applied when the weeds are actively growing and a surfactant should be added to the herbicide.

However, if the small grain field has a history of Canada thistle, then delaying the application until the thistle emerges is necessary to get control. To get the best thistle control, one should add to the tank mix a product strong on thistles or switch to one of these products alone. Stinger is the best rated product for thistle control and can be applied up until stage nine of the small grain development.

To Seed Alfalfa Using Good Establishment Principles

According to Dr. Marvin Hall, good stand establishment is essential to optimizing the production potential of alfalfa. Thin stands encourage weed invasion, reduce yield, and may shorten the life of the stand. Considering these negative consequences of poor stand establishment along with the high actual and opportunity costs associated with establishing alfalfa, it is important to minimize the chances of failure.

Numerous activities including

weed control, adjusting soil pH and fertility, and selecting the best variety need to be completed well in advance of actually seeding a new alfalfa stand. Remember that "the lack of planning is planning for failure."

Hall suggests the number one reason for poor alfalfa stand establishment is seeding too deep. The agronomic rule of thumb is not to plant a seed deeper than 5 times its diameter. That means that alfalfa shouldn't be seeded deeper than 1/4 inch. Any deeper than 1/4 inch increases risks of poor emergence and a weak stand. A tilled seedbed must be firm in order to have accurate seeding depth.

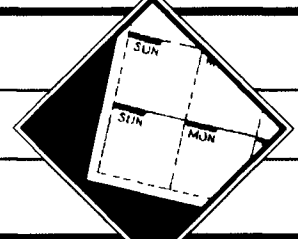
It is very important to attain good seed-to-soil contact. The alfalfa seed must absorb approximately 125 percent of its own weight in water to germinate. From the alfalfa seed's perspective, that's a lot of water! Since the water must move from the soil into the seed, it is crucial that the seed be in contact with as much soil as possible. Poor seed-to-soil contact results in poor and sporadic germination that lowers the number of productive alfalfa plants in the stand.

Alfalfa seeding rate recommendations vary considerably across the country depending on soil and environmental conditions. Reducing seeding rates below the recommended level is not the place to cut corners on alfalfa establishment. Economic analyses show that less than 4 percent of the total cost associated with alfalfa production is seed cost. Reducing alfalfa seeding rates is truly being "penny-wise and pound foolish."

While there has been a lot of debate over which seeding method (for example, broadcast, fluid seeding, or no-till) is the "best," it really isn't a big issue as long as each method is done correctly. This includes not seeding too deep, getting good seed-to-soil contact, and making sure enough seeds are being seeded per acre.

While these basic alfalfa establishment principles seem rather routine, every year there are unnecessary establishment failures. Many of these failures occurred because of one or more of the basic principles outlined above weren't followed. This year, don't focus on the details of alfalfa establishment so much that the basic principles are forgotten.

Quote Of The Week:
"Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community."
— Andrew Carnegie



❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, March 16

Pa. Hood Trimmer's Get-Together, Kish View Holsteins, Belleville, (717) 994-1636

4-H Farm Consignment Sale, York County 4-H Center, (717) 292-2198

Income Opportunities for Rural Areas Meeting, Adams County

Cooperative Extension, Gettysburg, (717) 334-6271.

Ohio Beef Expo, Ohio Expo Center, Columbus, (785) 776-7067.

Lavette County Extension Annual Board Meeting, Fayette County Fairgrounds, 6:30 p.m.

"The Future of Agriculture," Twin

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❖ FARM FORUM ❖

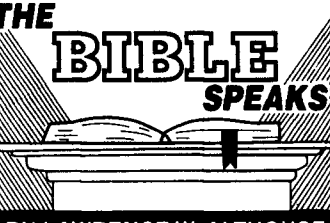
Editor:

On February 9, I was invited to attend an informational meeting in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn. for the purpose of discussing state milk orders. Through the efforts of a large and active group of Minnesota dairymen known as Milk Power, the Minnesota state legislature is considering enacting a state marketing order not dissimilar to the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB).

I found Dr. Ken Bailey of Penn State University in attendance, and he presented a comparison between the existing PMMB and the proposed Minnesota legislation. He included a six-page handout with his presentation.

To say that I was shocked by what Dr. Bailey had to say would be an understatement. His initial presentation omitted extremely relevant information on the PMMB, making it seem both ineffectual in dairy pricing and as little more than a regulatory state sanitation board. His "advice" to Minnesota was to forget the no-

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THE BIBLE SPEAKS

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

IS ABRAHAM IN YOUR FAMILY TREE?

Background Scripture: Romans 4.
Devotional Reading: Psalms 32:6-11.

It seems that we spend the first half of our lives hoping anxiously that we will get what's coming to us, and the second half hoping desperately that we will *not* get what is coming to us. We begin looking for justice and end depending upon mercy. At the start, our lives are focused on our own merit; at the end, upon the grace of God.

Sooner or later in life we realize that we will never be righteous enough to earn the favor of God. The gap between our moral capacity and God's will is just too wide to be bridged by human effort. God alone can and does bridge this terrible distance.

Many of us enter adult life believing that, if we work hard enough, long enough, sincerely and wisely

enough, we can win whatever it is in life that we are seeking. Our trust is basically in ourselves. But then, along the way, life deals us some blows and we learn that the results are not in our own hands. It is then that many of us realize that the only solution is to trust, not in ourselves, but in God and his promises.

Far Beyond Belief

This trust entails belief, but it goes far beyond belief. There are lots of things which I may believe, but it is the things in which we trust that make the difference in my life.

For example, there is a test which is sometimes given to determine in advance if a particular person can be hypnotized. The hypnotist stands behind the would-be subject and tells him to let himself fall backward into his arms. Many people will do just that because they believe he will do what he says. But there are some, who, no matter that they believe the sincerity of the hypnotist, cannot bring themselves to fall backward. They believe him but they do not trust him.

When Paul and other biblical writers speak of "faith," most often they are talking about the trust which goes far beyond belief. Belief is easy, but trust asks much more of us. So when Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, he is speaking of a "belief" which is demonstrated in trust. Abraham believed God's promises and entrusted himself to the Lord. Faith is a belief so strong that we entrust ourselves to it.

The word "reckoned" here means "credited." God gave Abraham credit, not for his works or his pro-

nounced beliefs, but for his trust. It is like getting a bill for a million dollars and finding on the statement a credit in the same amount. The amount of the credit is a gift that you could never have earned.

Easy To Say

It is easy to say "I believe in God Almighty," but something else to put yourself and life into the hands of that God. This usually requires something of a struggle.

For example, the promise of God to Abraham seemed utterly ridiculous. At their age they knew it was virtually impossible to conceive and bear a child. So the faithful response of Abraham is based not upon the reasonableness of the promise, but on the One who makes it. Certainly Abraham must have doubted the promises, even if only momentarily. But Paul says, "No distrust made him waiver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave the glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:20,21).

This trust is not a family or racial trait. Any and all of us can have it. If we offer God this trust we become the spiritual descendants of Abraham. It is offered to all "those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all..." (4:16).

Lancaster Farming
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