

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

This Lifestyle

It's always amusing to read from USDA what many farmers have already come to understand: it's hard to make a living on the farm. That's why so many people turn to work outside the farm.

In the July/August 2002 USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) Information Magazine, farm households are no different than other households, holding down multiple jobs. More than half of all U.S. farm operators work off-farm, according to the ERS, with 80 percent of them working full-time jobs. About half of all spouses are also employed off the farm.

Did you know that about 90 percent of total farm household income in 1999 originated from off-farm sources? The contribution of earned income off farm alone amounted to 53 percent of total farm household income.

What ERS and many other industries sometimes fail to understand is that farming is not just a job. For most, it is simply a way of life it's not the bottom line that counts for many, it's holding on to a precious way of living that nonfarm households sometimes can't comprehend.

The findings of the ERS report in AER 812, "Income, Wealth, and Economic Well-Being of Farm Households," includes some interesting things. There are many factors, including age and status of the farm operator, farm type and size, operator education, farm tenure, and family size. The most significant is the size of the farming operation. That seems self-evident.

ERS assures us that despite conventional thinking, farm households are not financially disadvantaged compared with other U.S. households. Part is the work ethic, imbued in farm operators since childhood. About half of farm households have both higher incomes and greater wealth than U.S. households as a whole. Of those households, 98 percent reported household income greater than consumption expenditures (farms being traditionally conservative in this regard, something many of us have understood since time immemorial).

Farms want to sustain that way of life, however they can. And they are more alike their nonfarm neighbors when they realize a dual-income household may have turned into a necessity if they want to maintain any kind of lifestyle at all.



Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Manage Feed Costs, Inventories

Lancaster County dairy agent Glenn Shirk points out it is important to determine if you have enough feed to carry you through to next year's harvest season. If not, you may want to take action now to lock in feed supplies, quality, and prices.

If panic is driving up the prices of conventional feeds (corn, soybeans, hay, etc.) you may want to have a discussion with your nutritionist to see if there are some more affordable, alternative feeds that can be worked into the ration. Alternative feeds can include small grains, soyhulls, cottonseed, citrus pulp, and other by-product feeds. The sooner you act on these options, the more choices and the better prices you are apt to find.

As you analyze this year's silage inventories, think tonnage, not volume. If your corn was drought-stricken, the silage may not have packed as well and it may not contain its usual amount of dry matter tonnage. In other words, it could "feed out faster" and you could find

yourself being out of silage prior to next year's harvest season.

When buying feeds, try to avoid paying "panic prices" for feeds of questionable quality. Acting early can help you stay ahead of panic situations. Be a good, fair negotiator. Corn silage will vary a lot this year, so price it according to quality. Short corn that has well developed ears may have higher-than-normal quality. Corn that has no ears or poorly developed ears may still have a lot of nutrients in the stalk and still have decent feeding value, perhaps 90-95 percent of normal.

Really stressed corn that is running low in moisture will have considerably less value, maybe only 60-80 percent of normal. Forage tests can help you get a better handle on its true value. Similarly, corn that is too dry and poorly packed or corn that is too wet will have reduced feeding value.

To Plant Emergency Forage Crops To Supplement Forage Supplies

In addition to seeking the best value in purchased feed, dairy and beef producers should plant emergency forage crops to add to the limited harvest from this dry summer.

Rain this week has made this an option that producers with feed shortages should pursue. At this point, the only crops available to plant this fall will be small grains: oats, rye, wheat, and barley.

Paul Craig, capitol region agronomy agent, suggests that successful planting of these crops is dependent on certain management factors. The first consideration would be soil moisture. With this week's rains to soften the soil and provide some moisture for germination, planting should be done as soon as possible. Even if the soil dries out again before the planting is accomplished, getting the seed in the ground will mean it will be ready for the next rain. The only risk at this point is the cost of planting, which is small compared to the cost of replacement feed.

Another consideration for double cropping would be which corn herbicides were used this season. Early season rains were helpful in reducing the affect of soil herbicides, but the unusual drought conditions could possibly result in many instances of higher-than-normal residue levels. Oats are the most susceptible of small grains to atrazine. Barley is the next most susceptible, followed by wheat. Rye is the least susceptible small grain to atrazine. Producers considering these crops should consult the pesticide label and their agronomic product suppliers for their opinions.

Oats planted in late summer have the potential to provide 3 to 5 tons of forage this fall, depending on the length of the growing season. Oats can survive fairly heavy frosts and still develop. The oats will head out and delaying harvest as long as possible will increase tonnage and feed quality.

Late fall conditions can be a challenge to get adequate wilting for ensilage. The use of inoculants will be beneficial. Many graziers have incorporated no-tilling oats into pastures on a regular basis. The planting rate should be 2 to 3 bushels per acre. Bin run seed can be used to reduce costs if germination is checked.

Winter grains can also provide forage this fall if planted early and at higher seeding rates. Most production will be next spring. If harvested or grazed this fall, try to leave three inches of growth. Many growers are considering mixing two bushels of oats with these winter small grains. The oats will be harvested this fall and then freeze out.

For optimum production, the addition of 40 to 50 pounds of nitrogen (N) is recommended. In many fields, there should be enough unused N from the corn crop. Growers will need to evaluate this on a field-by-field situation.

Quote of The Week:

"The whole of science is nothing more than the refinement of everyday thinking."

— Albert Einstein

◆ FARM CALENDAR ◆

- Saturday, August 31
Juniata County Fair, thru Sept. 7.
- Sunday, September 1
Cambria County Fair, thru Sept. 7.
- Monday, September 2
Lancaster Farming office closed.
Ox Hill Community Fair, thru Sept. 7.
Spartanburg Community Fair, thru Sept. 7.
Waterford Community Fair, thru Sept. 7.
West Alexander Community Fair, thru Sept. 7.
- Tuesday, September 3
Bellwood-Antis Farm Show, thru Sept. 7.
Claysburg Farm Show, thru Sept. 7.
Jamestown Community Fair, thru Sept. 7.
Master Gardener Program, Carroll County, Maryland Extension Office, Tuesdays only, 9

- a.m.-1 p.m., thru Oct. 29, (410) 386-2760.
- Wednesday, September 4
Luzerne County Fair, thru Sept. 8.
Penn State Agronomic Field Diagnostic Clinic, Rockspring Agronomy Farm, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., also Sept. 5.
Lehigh Valley Twilight Potato meeting, Clearview Farm, Slatington, 6:30 p.m., (610) 391-9840.
Hands on Computer Class, Windows II, Franklin County Extension Office, Chambersburg, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., also Sept. 5, (717) 263-9226.
Small Grains and Corn Twilight meeting, Franklin County Extension office, Chambersburg, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., (717) 263-9226.
Berks County Extension: Barn Meeting and Pasture Walk for Experienced Graziers, Nevin Mast farm, Oley, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

- Thursday, September 5
Prince George's County, Maryland Fair, thru Sept. 8, (301) 579-2598.
Somerset County Holstein Show, Fairgrounds, Meyersdale.
Vegetable and Cover Crop Twilight Meeting, Central Maryland Research and Education Center, Clarksville facility, Ellicott City, Md., 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m., (410) 313-2702.
Tioga County Pasture Walk and Seasonal Calving discussion, Russell Root farm, Millerton.

(Turn to Page A32)

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, 'REPENT'?

Background Scripture:
2 Chronicles 29 through 30; 2 Kings 18 through 20.
Devotional Reading:
Psalms 122:1-9.

Following the tragic crime of Sept. 11 last year, there were two diametrically opposed reactions from religious quarters. One, representing many Moslems and a few Christians, saw these events as the judgment of God upon the U.S. and our way of life. The other reaction, primarily from American Christians, was that God is on our side because we are a Christian nation. (I would join with those who challenge whether we can any longer identify ourselves as 'a Christian nation'.)

One prominent TV preacher said that Sept. 11 represented God's judgment upon our society. He said that it was a wake-up call for our nation to repent. "What do you mean, 'repent'?" was the thunderous reply of the great majority of Americans. One letter to the editor of a daily newspaper wanted to know if we were to "repent of being the nation with the most personal freedom, or of the highest standard of living in the

world, or of its well-established reputation for generosity and compassion?"

I do not believe that Sept. 11 was God's judgment upon our nation, nor do I believe that the terrorists were in any way justified in their crime. At the same time, however, I do believe that we are in error if we believe that God is not calling us as a nation to repent. I believe we are the most free and materially well-off nation in the world, but that does not mean that our national life does not call for God's judgment.

The Chosen Few

Consider, for example, the Jews of Old Testament times. They were God's chosen people and, for the sake of argument, let's assume their society was the best at that time. Nevertheless, God judged them and found them wanting. Actually, perhaps it was because they were his chosen people that God expected more of Israel and Judah.

When Hezekiah ascended the throne in Jerusalem at the age of 25, he became king of the people whom God had elected as his own. Almost immediately, however, he set about to reform and revive the faith of his people and called them to repent. Apparently, the temple had fallen on hard times of disrepair and neglect. His first effort, thus, was to cleanse the temple, for the temple represented the people.

What began with the cleansing of the temple, therefore, culminated in a call for the cleansing of the whole society. His command to the Levites to "carry out the filth from the holy place" would become a call to get rid of the filth in their society. "For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have for-

saken him, and have turned away their faces..." (2 Chron. 29:5,6).

'Laughed To Scorn'

The response was not unanimous. Some did answer his call, but in certain places — Ephraim, Manasseh, as far as Zebulun — "they laughed them to scorn" (30:10).

Of what did God's chosen people have to repent? This was the response, not only to Hezekiah's call for repentance and reformation, but to all of the prophets in Old Testament times. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all called for the repentance of God's chosen people because their society was rife with corruption, bribery, indifference to and oppression of the poor, dishonesty, sexual immorality, and idolatry.

And what of us and our society today? Is there no corruption of which we need to repent? No bribery? Indifference to the poor? Dishonesty? Sexual immorality? And what about idolatry? Do you think God is not displeased with the materialism that has become the idolatry of our society? Do you think he does not judge America for the steady erosion of churches and denominations? Do you think that the billions of dollars spent on political campaigns to buy politicians escapes his judgment?

The call to repentance was tempered by the promise of God's grace: "For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will find compassion... For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him" (30:9).

How To Reach Us

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Please note: Include your full name, return address, and phone number on the letter. Lancaster Farming reserves the right to edit the letter to fit and is not responsible for returning unsolicited mail.

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