

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Who Calls The Shots?

Some local township ordinances— laws that some believe to be simply rene-gade, frivolous, and illegal — are challenging the Right To Farm Act.

Recently, the House refused to vote on Senate Bill 1413, a simple rule that would have created liability for those willing to restrict large-scale agriculture in communities. SB 1413 expired Nov. 27 after an amended version passed the Senate by a vote of 45-3.

The amendment to the Right to Farm Act may not need an update. This whole issue of trying to limit expansion of farms by townships needs another solution.

The solution? Ag preservation areas. County planners need to work closely with local townships to ensure ag preservation areas exist, free of new development, free of the restrictions that nonfarm general public, many from urban areas, want to place on farm expansion.

The heart of the bill contained language that would allow farmers to be reimbursed for legal fees when bringing lawsuits against townships for ordinances ruled illegal in court. All this did was set farmer against township, township against farmer. It was reaction — not pro-action.

A bigger issue for farmers: who is calling the shots? Walt Peechatka, executive vice president, PennAg Industries Association, spoke Wednesday afternoon this week during a segment of the Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders Annual Conference in Harrisburg. Peechatka noted that those who try to advise townships to adopt these frivolous lawsuits include environmentalists, preservationists (not conservationists), animal rights groups, those who moved from cities to countryside, anti-ag activists, and groups that have considerable success because they are well-funded and can communicate easily via Internet. They put ridiculous restrictions on the ways farmers need to conduct themselves simply to make a living.

John Bell, legal counsel with Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, agrees with Peechatka that farmers are not calling the shots at the local level. This issue is "the most frustrating issue in the 21 years I've been with the Farm Bureau," Bell said.

More and more, whether they like it or not, legal councils representing farm families have to be adversarial and confrontational, Bell noted. Farmers need to become more educational to the nonfarm public and to "sell ourselves." Producers need to get to know township officials, need to become involved with the media in telling the story on a personal basis, and need to work to promote themselves.

Years ago, farmers were the majority — now they're the minority on many township supervisor boards. They need to actually become members of township supervisor boards if ag is to remain viable.

If we don't solve these issues, if animal ag remains under attack, noted Peechatka, then "long-term animal agricultural survival is in jeopardy," he said. "We must continue to be model farmers and model agribusinesspersons and our standards of ethics must be above reproach. Ag must begin calling the shots if we're going to remain strong and remain the number one industry in the commonwealth."



Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Complete Year-End Business Planning

Regional Farm Management Agent Roland Freund reminds producers to complete any 2002 business planning before celebrating the New Year!

The calendar gets very full with church, family, and fun celebrations at this time, so business tasks tend to end up on the back burner. But prudent farm managers will take steps to save taxes, know if they have accounted for finances accurately, and collect the information needed to accurately measure 2002 business performance.

There are a number of essential tasks for the year-end "to-do list." First one should pay all bills that are due. This is a good business practice, and it simplifies the task of preparing the list of accounts payable if there are none! Each dollar spent could save you 50 cents or more in taxes.

Second, Freund suggests producers should count their blessings and review their charitable giving. There is much to be thankful for this year. At this season, give generously to your church and charities. Not only will you share your blessings, but contributions give you the same tax break as advance purchases of feed or supplies.

Another important year-end step

is to complete farm records. Next year starts a new record period for most farmers. Confusion reigns when two sets of books are used simultaneously, so it is important to get all available transactions recorded promptly. However, it may not be possible to finally close the books until some statements are available. These include bank statements giving you the amount of interest and principal to record.

Next, producers should take inventory, since the end-of-year inventory is essential for analysis. For accuracy it should be completed before you retire New Year's Eve, but having to use a flashlight can be cumbersome! If it is done carefully, every year balance sheet changes can be calculated for the 2002 accrual adjustments. Bank balance-sheet forms can be used to record the information. Computerized systems should have them built in.

If you need a worksheet or spreadsheet, call (717) 240-6500 or e-mail rfreund@psu.edu. The "Dairy Farm Feed Cost Control" spreadsheet can help with silo capacity and such computations. Go to <http://capitaldairy.cas.psu.edu/>, click on "Tools Archive," and scroll down to download it.

The "Current Assets" section of the inventory includes "Growing crops." Enter the value of seed, fertilizer/lime, and fuel invested. Record crops for sale and feed including feed in mill storage and prepurchases. Significant supplies of fertilizer, chemicals, and semen must be listed and valued. Feeder livestock and growing heifers should be included.

"Accounts receivable" (milk check, crop/livestock sales etc.) and "Cash Balance" (checking plus savings plus what's stashed in the mattress) must be accurately recorded to make any cash flow check reliable.

Feed and livestock inventories should be valued at a conservative farm-gate value. That means market price less commission, less the cost of getting them to the selling point. If the auction sells a single ton of hay for \$150, buyers might only offer \$110 for each of your 1,000 tons of hay equivalent at your farm.

As a rule of thumb, consider each dry matter ton of haylage to be worth no more than a ton of hay made from the same cut. To convert high-moisture shelled corn to its dry bushel equivalent, use the formula Pounds

wet x D.M. (as decimal) ÷ 47.36. Example: (50 tons at 70 percent D.M.) is 100,000 pounds x 0.7 ÷ 47.36 = 1,478 bushels. For ear corn, use the factor 59.2 in the formula. With heifers, it may be appropriate to change values to reflect the market swings, but keep them conservative.

In December you should also update your list of capital assets. Your accountant needs information on sales and purchases of all capital assets to maintain the depreciation (basis) record. But you need to do your own fair market valuation annually.

Unless you are planning to sell out, avoid wild fluctuations in dairy cow values, and don't escalate land values annually. These gimmicks can seriously distort analysis. Aim to reduce the value of equipment in inventory and dairy buildings and structures by 10 to 20 percent annually.

At this time you should also begin a liabilities list. Bank statements will furnish information on loan activity later. You need to pay particular attention to unpaid bills, especially those more than 60 days due, and credit card balances.

Finally, plan to pay taxes. Family living draws and principal payments on nondepreciable land, family residence or gold bars (with very few exceptions) only be paid with *after-tax* dollars. A family with four exemptions spending \$50,000 on the above should expect to "render unto the Caesars" of federal, Social Security, state, and local a total of \$13,000. If they spend \$75,000 or \$100,000 they can anticipate tax bills of \$22,000 and \$32,000, respectively. If exempt from Social Security, the same family would expect tax bills of approximately \$7,000, \$13,000, and \$20,000 at the three levels cited above.

To have such levels of these benefits and consistently go to extreme measures to pay lower taxes is called fraud. Using debt to finance tax avoidance can create future economic hardship.

Getting a good start on these tasks will help you to have greater joy and peace to face next year with courage and hope.

Quote Of The Week:

"I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into another room and read a book."

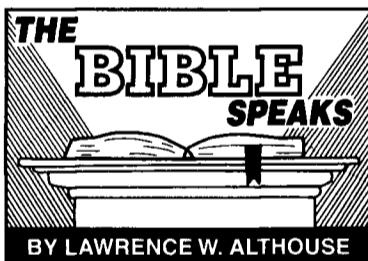
— Groucho Marx

ATTENTION PROPERTY BUYERS

BE AWARE THAT DURING CERTAIN TIMES OF THE YEAR, FLIES, DUST, AND ODOR MAY CAUSE IRRITATIONS TO YOUR LIFE.

— Sign erected by feedlot owner Jim Miller LaSalle, Colo

(Reprinted From The Furrow Magazine)



OBEYING OUR ANGELS

Background Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23.
Devotional Reading: Isaiah 11:1-5.

It was sometime after midnight, and I was probably the only one in the house still awake. The house was a villa inhabited by a lawyer and his wife, our hosts for the night, on the outskirts of Nuremberg, Germany. We were part of a small group of youth leaders who were touring Bavaria with the director of youth work for the Evangelische or state Protestant Church of Bavaria.

I spoke a little German, but was not very successful in conversing with our hosts. So my wife and I felt somewhat isolated. Even worse, my wife seemed to have a fever and was obviously coming down with something. She was sleeping, but I was still awake, wondering what to do if she really became seriously ill.

I must have dozed off, because some while later I was awakened with the immediate sense that someone else was in the room. I looked at the foot of the bed and there was just

enough light from the bathroom door that I could make out the figure of a man. I don't know how, but almost instantly I "knew" that this was the Christ through whom I had been praying for help. With a clarity that I can still hear in my mind's ear, I heard him say to me just two words: "Fear Not." Then he reached forward and touched the bed and it began to vibrate. And then the experience was over.

Just A Dream?

Now, many of you will say that it was "just a dream" and, if I was hearing this story from someone else, I would say that myself. But at that moment and 40-plus years later I did not and do not think it was "just a dream." But even if it was a dream, I remain confident that it was Christ himself who brought me this message: "Fear Not."

There was no reason given as to why I should not fear. The presence of Christ alone was sufficient reason to "Fear Not."

We often overlook the fact that, in the Nativity story, Joseph, Mary's betrothed, on four different occasions was given messages from God during dreams. The first of these came as Joseph was contemplating divorcing Mary because he has learned that she was with child and he knew he was not the father. But, in a dream, an angel informs Joseph that Mary has conceived this child by the power of the Holy Spirit and the son to be named Jesus ("God saves") will indeed "save his people from their sins" (1:28). This message from God changed Joseph's heart and, when he awoke, "he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him..." (1:24). His upbringing, culture, and personal emotions would have led to divorce, but he obeyed God's angel.

Another dream came sometime after the departure of the Wise Men: an angel came to warn him to flee with his family to Egypt. Now the trip the angel was proposing was dangerous and daunting, but once again Joseph obeyed his angelic messenger. Later, at the death of Herod, an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to return with his family to Israel. And, arriving there, a dream warned him to take his family to Galilee.

Different Folks

Why did Joseph receive these messages only in dreams? Why did he not have visions or even hear the "still, small voice" of God?

The answer is that God speaks to us in many different ways. Some of us are open to "the still, small voice" within, others dazzling visions. Some of us neither hear nor see the message, but it can bubble up into our consciousness whenever we give God the opportunity.

There have been times in my life when I would have jumped at the chance to hear a voice or see a vision, but it has happened only a few times to me in dreams. Otherwise, I get God's message through scriptures, the deeds and words of others, in the events of the world around me — and often as a slowly growing certainty.

The trick is not in hearing, seeing, or sensing our angels but, like Joseph, in acting on the messages they bring.

❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, December 14

- Pa. Cattlemen's College, Tofrees Resort and Conference Center, State College, 9 a.m., (814) 863-3661.
- Passing on Farm Workshop, Pa. Farm Link, Lycoming County Extension Office, Williamsport, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., (717) 664-7077.
- Pa. Beef Council's Board of Directors annual meeting, Tofrees Resort and Conference Center, State College, 1 p.m.-4:30 p.m., (717) 939-7000.
- Cornell Sheep and Goat Marketing Program, Town Hall, Chichester, N.H., 10 a.m.-2 p.m., (607) 255-2851.

Sunday, December 15

Monday, December 16

- Ohio Dairy Management Conference, University Plaza Hotel, Columbus, Ohio, thru Dec. 17,

(614) 292-3799.

- Chemical Applicators' School, Holiday Inn, Grantville, (717) 921-8803.
- Ohio State Agronomy meeting, Trumbull Career and Technical Center, Warren, Ohio, (330) 675-2595.
- New Farm Bill Informational Meeting, Carbon/Monroe FSA office, Lehighton, 10 a.m., (610) 377-6300.
- Poultry Management Seminar Series, Ventilation and its Challenges for Poultry Producers, Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, Gettysburg, (717) 394-6851.

Tuesday, December 17

- Holstein Association USA Region 2 meeting, Holiday Inn, New Cumberland, 10 a.m.

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Lancaster Farming

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