



OPINION

New Solutions Are Required In 2003

Editor's note for all Guest Editorials: Please keep in mind that the opinions of the writers don't necessarily agree with the editor's. For the benefit of our diverse readership, we strive to provide a balance of opinion in Lancaster Farming.

Guest Editorial By Brian W. Snyder
Executive Director

Pennsylvania Association For Sustainable Agriculture (PASA)

Now that much of the dust has settled from the vigorous debate over Senate Bill 1413, it is time for all of us to pause and imagine where we should go from here. Already, some messages are circulating that a third incarnation of the bill will be introduced early in the next session of the legislature — many readers will recall that SB 1413 started out in life as SB 826.

My fear is that such a shortsighted and reactionary approach would only lead to more division within Pennsylvania's agricultural community, and certainly less chance of a lasting solution that supports both farmers and rural communities.

I read with great interest the account in this paper of remarks from Walt Peechatka, executive vice president of PennAg Industries Association. It was reported that Mr. Peechatka described the proponents of excessive local regulation in the state as falling neatly into the categories of environmentalists, preservationists, animal rights advocates, newcomers to country living, anti-ag activists, and/or members of other well-funded groups who know how to use e-mail.

Sadly, an understanding of the essential nature of the current debate is missing entirely in this and other attempts to pigeonhole away the very real problems facing modern agriculture. Such oversimplification serves only to fan the flames of discontent.

The fact ignored in Peechatka's remarks, and he is by no means alone in making this omission, is that a different view of agriculture is rapidly on the rise in Pennsylvania and across the country. This new perspective on agriculture is in stark contrast to the tired, old one in which farms are industrialized and must continually grow or fail. There are many differences between the old and new views of farming in this country, but for the purposes of this discussion, the identity and location of a farm's "customers" is a key.

New farms, as I describe them here, have easily identified customers that range from private individuals to buying clubs, restaurants, institutions, and/or grocery stores that are within a reasonable driving distance of the farm. Consumers of products from these farms are often able to interact directly with the farmer on a personal level, and can even visit the farm if they wish.

In contrast, the customers of industrialized farms, by which I mean those facilities that prioritize high production through animal confinement or other capital-intensive means, tend to have customers that are more difficult to discern. They include large marketing co-ops, corporate food processors and distributors, commodity markets, etc. Farmers operating by this model rarely interact personally with or get to know the people who consume their products. In fact, the current indicator of success for this model is that more and more product is exported further and further away from its source, and is mixed beyond recognition with similar products from countless other farms.

There will surely be some folks who would hope to dispute the contrasting definitions I have offered, but it is time for all of us to realize the big difference between farmers whose customers live in close proximity and are willing

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❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

2003

Wednesday, January 1

Happy New Year! Lancaster Farming office closed.

Thursday, January 2

Annual Vegetable Growers' Meeting, Bareville Firehall, Bareville, 12:30 p.m.-3 p.m.,

(717) 656-9592.

"Vegetable, Flower, and Herb Transplants: What Buyers Need and Consumers Demand," Kutztown Produce Auction meeting room, 7 p.m., (610) 682-6094.

Dairy Marketing Meeting, Berks

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❖ FARM FORUM ❖

Editor.

We also are members of PASA (Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture), like Paul E. Hauser of Chester County, and applaud his logic in opposing SB1413 because it does not allow communities to have a voice in their own futures. We all need clean air and water.

The problem of perchlorate contamination of water as reported recently in The Wall Street Journal could be serious. Autism is some-

thing we do not want to see in our grandchildren. We must protect the water from endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

The organic sustainable production of food movement is growing faster every year. It takes three years to get your organic certification. We hope that the farmers are preparing for this financial windfall.

Let us all oppose SB1413.

Paul and Janet Baer
Jarrettsville, Md.

Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Celebrate The New Year With Your Family

The beginning of a New Year is a great time to stop and reflect on the blessing we have enjoyed in the past year and to look ahead to the opportunities of the New Year. In the paragraphs below are some thoughts on evaluating your business and making changes. While it is specifically focused on dairy enterprises, most of the principles apply to other businesses as well, so read on even if you are not in the dairy business.

New Year's celebrations, like birthdays, are reminders of how quickly our season of life is passing. This provides a reminder to review how we are meeting life's most important goals. We may need to evaluate how to modify our business activities to make sure our work isn't crowding out other important goals. Think about how to get more time for family and faith in your activities in 2003.

Don't forget to start the New Year properly, showing your support for the livestock and horticultural industries by enjoying a hearty meal of

pork, sauerkraut, and mashed potatoes. Then sit down to cheer on the Penn State Football team in the Capital One Bowl. Pork, sauerkraut, and Penn State Football on New Year's Day — it doesn't get any better than that!

To Make New Year's Resolutions For Your Business

Beth Grove, extension agent, dairy/environment in Lancaster, agrees that New Year's is a good time to reflect on the family dairy farm business and goals for the future of the operation.

Like our personal resolutions, such as getting more exercise, often our New Year's resolutions for our business don't come easily. They require hard work and discipline to achieve. In that same sense, many times it is easier on a dairy farm to keep working with your head down and not make the time to look ahead and plan for future goals on the farm.

The enormous amount of work involved in keeping the operation running on a daily basis can be overwhelming, particularly to young dairy farmers with little children, leaving little time for reflection.

The time and energy in planning for the coming year on a farm is often time well spent, however. Why not sit down with your family in the coming weeks and analyze your farm business? For example, are the sales from your operation meeting your financial needs and goals? This past year was terrible for milk prices, but were you able to keep the family and farm expenses met? Are production costs in line, or are some costs growing more rapidly than usual? What are your strengths and weaknesses on the dairy, and what might be creative ways to improve the shortcomings on your farm? Do you have enough family time, and if not, how can this be changed?

A great way to make some effective changes and gain ideas from outside sources is to create a dairy advisory team for your operation. There are many such teams already in place in the area, and they normally consist of the herd owner, a herds-

man (if different from the owner), nutritionist, veterinarian, financial adviser, extension agent, and/or other farm consultants. At first thought, this may sound like something most farmers don't feel comfortable with, but these groups can be very helpful in allowing for communication between the vet, nutritionist, and other advisers on a regular basis.

Best of all, outsiders often bring experience and ideas from other farms to your doorstep, free of charge! Again, such a group takes time and effort to create, but the benefits can more than outweigh the costs.

If finances are a problem, there are qualified farm consultants available in many areas to assist with evaluating options. Since you will be preparing for taxes in the next few weeks, use a balance sheet to evaluate your costs of production. Perhaps there are places you can save money on your dairy by using available resources differently or by changing the way the cows are fed or managed. Are you better off to purchase some feeds rather than growing them? Could someone else raising your heifers free up pasture and resources to make the milking herd more profitable? If you have access to good pasture but limited cropping equipment, is grazing an option?

If you are using DHIA on your farm, this is an excellent way to evaluate the basic performance and productivity of your herd. DHIA is one of the best tools available to the dairy producer. How can you change something if you don't measure it?

There are many goals and "benchmarks" available to evaluate your herd's performance, with most based upon the economics of increasing milk quality and production while reducing the costs associated with poor reproduction. The goals are simply designed to get you started. You can ask your farm consultants or call the Lancaster County Extension office at (717) 394-6851 for more information.

Quote of The Week:

"You got to be careful if you don't know where you are going, because you might not get there."

— Yogi Berra

THE BIBLE SPEAKS
BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

GET READY!
GET SET!

Background Scripture:

Matthew 3; 11:2-19.

Devotional Reading: John 1:1-14.

When I first saw the scripture passages for this week, I thought there must be a mistake. John the Baptist is usually treated in Advent. But then it occurred to me that (1) Christmas does not end at midnight on December 25 and (2) the message of John the Baptist is always relevant, for we have to continually prepare to receive him into our lives. Every day of our lives can and should be both an Advent and a Christmas.

"When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism... (John)... said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' (3:7). People were heeding his message to "Repent" and they confessed their sins and sought his baptism. But John knew that for many, repentance was more of a ritual than a spiritual reality.

Especially the Pharisees and Sadducees. This is ironic because they thought of themselves as the spiritual elite. They were proud and often arrogant concerning their religious pedigree. So when they repented,

they weren't really repenting; their egos kept them from recognizing the depth of their sins.

Repent? Me?

There is nothing more difficult than to teach someone something they think they already know and just as difficult for people who think they are upstanding in their religion to really repent. Both think they are already "there" and don't realize how far they are from "there." The finest people I know are those who do not think of themselves as "righteous" — and vice versa. The higher our spiritual consciousness, the more we realize how much further we need to go.

Both John and Jesus had a simple test: tangible or visible "fruits." John proclaimed, "Bear fruit that befits repentance" (3:8). Later, Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16) and "Herein is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit" (Jn. 15:8). Still later, Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (5:22,23).

Instead of bearing fruit, the Pharisees and Sadducees focused on their pedigree. John, however, warns them: "... do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,'; for I tell you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Mt. 3:9).

Today, Christians may think of themselves as children of Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, and others. And in a sense, we are their children. But if we are truly their children — and therefore disciples of Jesus Christ — our lives will be fruitful. True pedigree bears fruit that befits repentance.

Really Changed!

Not that we earn our salvation with these fruits, but that the stamp of authenticity is the fruits it produces. As J.B. Phillips renders in Mt. 3:18: "Go and do something to show that your hearts are really changed." A repentance not resulting in a "change of heart" is not a true repentance. A "change of heart" that does not produce "fruits" is not a true "change of heart."

It is easy to say the words or go through the motions of repentance, but that is not what it means to be "ready" for the coming of Christ.

I have never come to the end of a day thinking that there was nothing in those 24 hours for which I needed to repent. Even when my efforts have produced some "fruits" and I have refrained from saying or doing anything injurious or unhelpful to others, I know I have not completely walked the way of Jesus. Even in my best moments, "self" gets in the way, especially when I congratulate myself for them. But there is so much more that I could do or be in every day. If that is not also true in your life, what an exalted accomplishment! But how lonely it must be standing on that higher level.

If every day is a potential Christmas for Christ to be born anew into our hearts, so it is also axiomatic that it is a day for us to "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight". Every day of our lives we need to "Get ready, get set..." to receive him.

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