

Seminar Examines Agriculture's Past, Present, Future

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Food And Family
Features Editor

BLUE BALL (Lancaster Co.) — To help agriculturalists understand and meet changing demands, Blue Ball National Bank hosted its 20th agricultural seminar, Feb. 5, at the Blue Ball Fire Company.

For 41 years, Glenn Shirk served as the Lancaster County dairy extension agent. Now retired, Shirk recapped the changes he has seen.

When Shirk first came to the county, two-thirds of the farms where operated by non-Amish. The average herd size was 39.

That has switched. Now two-thirds of county farmers are Amish. Farm size, milk marketing, biotechnology, and free marketing economy is changing the way business is conducted.

Niche marketing has become more important.

Profit margins must be thoroughly examined to remain viable. Shirk and Charles Few, trust development officer for the bank, explained how interest rates affect investments.

Because interest earnings are at an all time low, people are being enticed to participate in get-rich scams and are being scammed in the process.

Few stressed the importance of working with financial people you know and trust.

Advantages and disadvantages of the swine industry were explored by Robert Ruth, president of Country View Family Farms, Middletown.

In dealing with negative community response toward pig operations, Ruth said issues are often based on misconceptions.

On the aroma issue that pigs smell, Ruth encouraged farmers to invite neighbors to see their operation. In reality, Ruth said, pig operations don't smell bad except when manure is spread.

Ruth said only five percent of the population is against the hog industry. "The others are for us," he said.

Some of the audience expressed concern that the hog industry will grow in the Midwest and hurt Pennsylvania operations.

Ruth said, "When you compare costs, land, corn, and buildings — all are more expensive here but the cost of production in Pennsylvania is still cheaper when compared with other states. The West can't produce and ship here cheaper than us."

Ruth who has been affiliated with agriculture in many states and in various parts of the world believes that the future of agriculture in Pennsylvania is good.

Other speakers include Kenneth Bailey and Lou Moore who examined dairy marketing and how it relates to the Farm Bill and agriculture's outlook in Pennsylvania and the world.



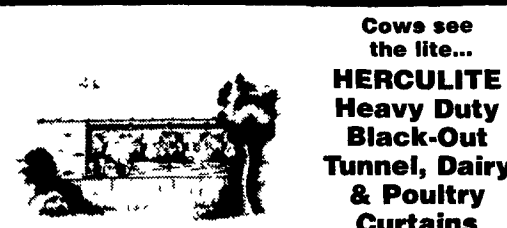
Presenters at Blue Ball Bank's agricultural seminar, seated from left, Chuck Few, Ken Overly, and Alan Strock. Back from left, are Robert Ruth, Lou Moore, Glenn Shirk, and Ken Bailey.

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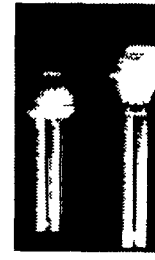
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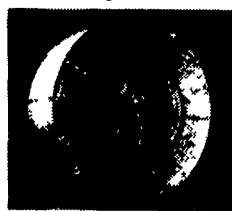
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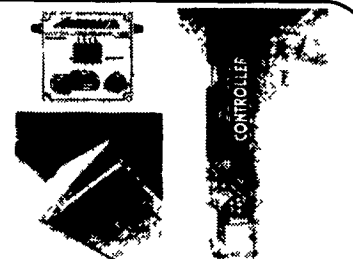


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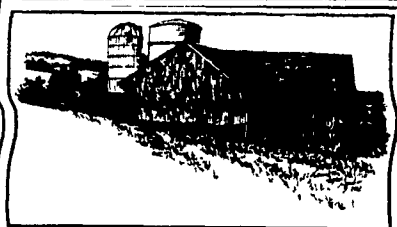


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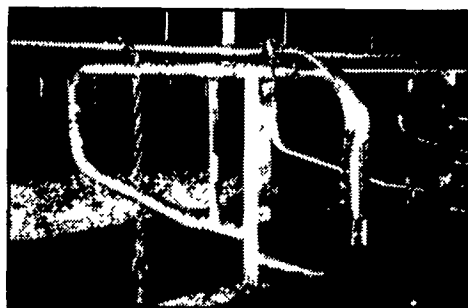
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