

Agri-Education Seminar Addresses Emotional Stresses That Impact Family Farming

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Times are tough economically for farmers. All agricultural commodity prices are low. Bio-security concerns, changing technology, government policies, and harsh weather patterns combine to put more stress on farm families.

Dwindling prices, bank loans, and the results of last year's drought-withered crops are having a detrimental affect on family relationships. Concerned that the negative dynamics of human relationships can destroy family farms, First Union's Agri-Education Seminar last week included a session of helping families learn to handle stresses and resolve conflict.

"During extended periods of farm stress from being over worked with little rest, constant worry, low market prices, and financial hardships," Hanson said, "it is often the ones that we love the most that are the first to experience our frustrations. Our sense of helplessness in not being able to change the present situation builds up anger that spills out on those we love the most."

"I have spent 24 years counseling farm families that are being pulled apart from stresses," Dr. Ronald Hanson, Nebraska, said. "I know what it's like. I came from one of those families."

Growing up in a farm family in the Mid-West, Hanson learned from experience that low farm prices force many farm producers to leave agriculture.

"But the real tragedy is that many farm family relationships will be destroyed during this process," Hanson said.

Demands on time and economic stresses cause families to lose perspective on what is most important — family relationships.

"Farms can be replaced, but if you destroy a marriage or lose a family, you are not always given a second chance," Hanson said.

Hanson outlined potential areas of disagreements that many



Dr. Ronald Hanson, left, Nebraska, knows from first-hand experience that stresses from farming can destroy family relationships. In addition to teaching ag economics at the University of Nebraska, Hanson spends much of his time teaching and counseling farm families on how to resolve conflicts.

families — especially those with several generations farming together face. Conflicts on decision making, implementing new ideas, and money-spending are at the top of the list.

Families must learn to communicate their viewpoints but at the same time be respectful of differing opinions within the family. They must be willing to compromise, Hanson said.

Fathers, especially, must allow their adult children to learn from mistakes without condemning them with the attitude of "I told you so."

Hanson said that fathers and sons have many more conflicts than fathers and daughters in family partnerships.

"In my 24 years of counseling, I never had a father and daughter come for counseling," Hanson said. "Dads don't see daughters as a threat."

Instead, Hanson believes, dads see sons as an extension of themselves and raise them to be like them and do things "my way."

Hanson's outlined numerous strategies to resolve family conflicts.

"To operate a successful farming operation takes a lot of effort with all family members," Hanson said. "It takes patience, persistence, understanding, courage, personal strength, and forgiveness."

Families can benefit from having a third party such as a counselor help them work through differences in a more objective and professional matter.

"Too many times we keep things bottled up inside. The attitude is 'I have to find a way to work this out myself. This sense of isolation solves nothing and depression can result.'"

Farm families are very private, but personal pride and stubbornness that keep them from sharing personal feelings also keeps them from solving family differences.

Often expressions of "I love you," and "I appreciate you" are left unsaid when family members are farming together. Hanson said appreciation needs to be expressed in family relationships. Sharing a few simple words of appreciation and love can make a dramatic difference in any farm family relationship.

Other Topics

Other topics addressed at the agri-educational seminar on Unusual Times, Unusual Actions included a keynote address by Dr. Robert Steele, dean of Penn State's College of Agriculture Sciences. Steele told how the university pursues innovative solutions to biosecurity and technology advances in agriculture despite budget cuts.

"Only a small percentage of farmers east of the Mississippi are influencing federal Farm Policy. This must change," Steele said.

It's important for local farmers to become involved in legislative affairs because Federal farm policy will drive agriculture for the next 10 years.

According to Jay Bryson, global economist for Wachovia Securities, the U.S. economic outlook is set for recovery if low interest rates continue, the war with Iraq is short, there are no more terrorists' attacks or other unforeseeable events.

Dr. David Kohl, ag economist from Virginia Polytechnical Institute, encouraged the audience to plan for the changing face of agriculture. Some of the changes he foresees are women becoming more involved in agriculture and ag finance. Consolidation in food companies with WalMart leading the pact in demanding how, when, where and why they want a product will force farmers to find innovative niches in marketing their products.

Kohl divided farmers into four

groups: hot shots with no wealth accumulation, achievers with positive wealth accumulation, coasters with negative wealth accumulation, and strugglers with no wealth accumulation.

Kohl explained the 10 characteristics of each group and what changes are needed to remain in farming.

Four out of five farmers are living off the wealth of the past generation, and it will cause eventual problems.

"It is not how much you make, but how much you spend," Kohl said.

"Cash is king," he said of the economy.

Youth and the future of agriculture was addressed by Pennsylvania Dairy Princess Raechel Kilgore, who told how 4-H, FFA, and the dairy princess program shows the immensity of agriculture's role in the world.

Reporting from Washington D.C. was John Blanchfield, director for American Bankers Association.

Reactions to current ag market forces by Penn State professors Dr. Lou Moore and Dr. Ken Bailey were reported in previous Lancaster Farming articles.



"You are not a weakling for seeking professional help (when dealing with stress)," said Darvin Boyd, senior vice president of agri-finance at First Union.

Manor FFA Members, Alumni Honored At Convention

MILLERSVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — The Manor FFA Career Development Meats team recently competed at the FFA National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. The team, composed of Jenna Bleacher, Ben Railing, Scott Gingrich, and Jeremy Appel placed first at FFA Activities Week at Penn State in June and earned the opportunity to compete in Louisville.

At nationals the team placed bronze and Scott Gingrich placed silver individually. During their competition the team identified forty retail cuts, yield and quality graded beef carcasses, took a written test, judged lamb and hog carcasses, placing of retail cuts, and a team event where they answered questions on beef carcasses.

Sponsors of the event include Excel Corporation, Hormel Foods Corp., Oscar Mayer Foods Corp., Premium Standard Farms, and Tyson Foods as a special project of the National FFA Foundation. It is one of 23 career development events held annually at the National FFA Convention.



Retired Penn Manor High School ag teacher Gus Birchler is pictured with American FFA degree winners. Back row, from left, Gus Birchler, Adam Nissley, Michael Hess, Jason Martin, Jeremy Railing, Allan Herr Jr. Front, Audrey Nissly.

Mifflinburg FFA Team Brings Home Gold

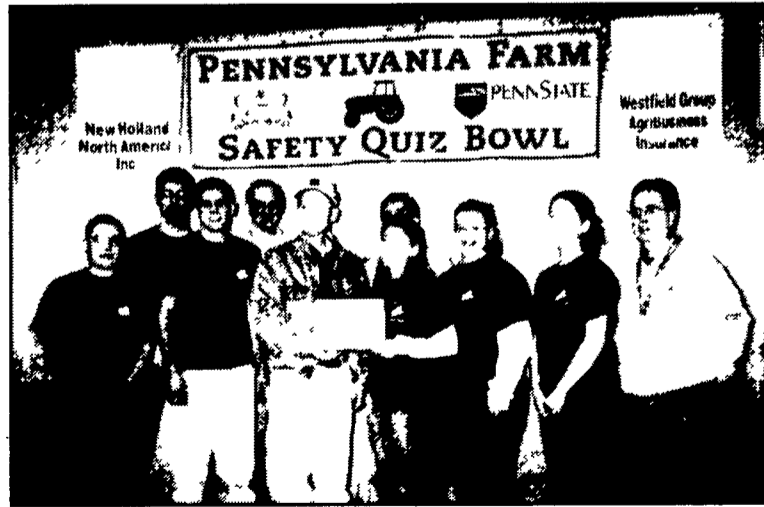
The Mifflinburg Area High School FFA Safety Bowl team proved to be the best of the best at the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

Team members Jamie Camp, Danielle Murphy, Nicole Murphy, Joe Spangler, and Jessica Zimmerman won first place in the competition. They qualified for the competition by placing at Ag Progress Days in August.

For the competition, students were quizzed on the topic of safety, including agriculture, home safety, tractor safety and more.



West Snyder FFA Farm Safety Team



The West Snyder FFA Chapter Farm Safety Challenge Team placed second in the state competition in the Farm Safety Challenge at the PA Farm Show. From left: West Snyder FFA Safety Challenge Team Jeremy Waite, Brad Novinger, Derek Fetterolf, John Tackelosky, PA Department of Agriculture, Sam Hayes, PA Secretary of Agriculture, Tiffany Esbenshade, Hannah Etzler, Jenna Briggs, and a sponsor from Ford New Holland.