

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Art Of Listening

We've been to many dairy meetings during the winter. One thing we've seen in common: if you want to survive as a dairy farmer, you have to run your farm as a business. It's a business first, a farm second.

For the older generation, that might not be too much of a problem. Probably the biggest impediment to any kind of success, however, is simply refusing to listen.

For the older generation farmers, that refusal to listen may start in the milking parlor, the tiestall, or at dinnertime. It's especially true when those who have trained to be dairy farmers in college bring ideas home with them about conducting the business, and the parent/owner/operators simply tune any new ideas out.

I think the older generation, time and again, may have to relearn how to do the business by accepting newer practices adopted by the younger. This art of listening can go both ways, too. The younger generation may not only have to ask why things are done the way they are, but learn exactly why they got that way in the first place (without getting the typical response such as "Hey, Grandpa and Dad did it that way, and that's the way it goes.")

Any business has to keep an open ear and a searching mind. Even in the newspaper business, we are looking for ways to improve our production and profitability. We have budgets to adhere to and we have to think up (sometimes ingenious) plans to make ends meet, too.

Families conduct their own life on a business principle.

How else are you supposed to do it?

This newspaper has a lot more special projects and sections to be published this year. Check out the front page of our Website at www.lancasterfarming.com. The farm economy is diversifying, and the family farm is far from what it once was.

We will be announcing several brand-new components of this newspaper in the weeks to come. Watch for them!

❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, March 29

Deer Density and Carrying Capacity Workshop, Black Moshannon State Park, (814) 355-4897.

Bradford-Sullivan County Dairy Day, Harlan Rowe Junior High School, Athens, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., rescheduled from Feb. 17, (570) 265-2896.

Horses 2003 Conference, Rutgers University's Equine Science Center, thru March 30.

Vermont Apple Tree Pruning Workshop, Hubert Outdoor Center, Fairlee, Vt., 9 a.m.-noon, (802) 333-3405.

DVC Green and Gold Holstein Spring Sale, Delaware Valley College, Doylestown.

Sunday, March 30

Monday, March 31

Holmes, Wayne County Grazing School, Part 2 of 3, Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen, Mt. Hope, Ohio, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., (330) 674-3015.

How To Reach Us

To address a letter to the editor:

• By fax, (717) 733-6058

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• By e-mail,
farming@lancnews.infi.net

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.

Horses 200 Industry Summit, Rutgers University Equine Science Center.

Emmaus Farmers' market meeting, Emmaus Borough Hall, Emmaus, 7 p.m., (610) 965-6279.

Basketry Exhibit, Historical Society of Berks County, thru June 21; Tuesday-Saturday 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Reading, (610) 375-4375.

Tuesday, April 1

Phosphorus Index Training, Myers Farm, Centre County, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. also April 3.

4-H Tractor Safety Course, Berks County Agricultural Center, Leesport, Deer Creek Equipment, Oxford, April 1, 3, 8, 10, 12, 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m.

Nutrient Management Info for Dairy Farmers, Edgewood Restaurant, Troy, 11 a.m., (570) 265-2809.

Pricing Milk for a Profit part 2, Clarion County Park, extension office, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m., (814) 782-0033.

Public Conflict Resolution Workshop, Lancaster Farm and Home Center, Lancaster, (717) 394-6851.

Small Farm Dream Class, April 1, 8, 15, 22, New England Small Farm Institute, Belchertown, Mass., (413) 323-4531.

Pa. Deer Overpopulation Lecture, Redwood Community Playhouse, Camp Upland, Upland, 7 p.m., (610) 690-2655.

Public Conflict Workshop, Gettysburg Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, (717) 334-6271.

Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit Annual Shareholders' meeting, Del-

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Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Explore Cheese-Making As An Alternative Income Source

A dairy economist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences said some dairy farmers in Pennsylvania may have to think outside the milk carton to survive in today's tough market. With milk prices extremely low and feed prices high because of the drought that parched crops last summer, operators of small dairy farms across the state are being squeezed.

Some are looking frantically for new sources of revenue to keep their businesses afloat, and Ken Bailey, associate professor of agricultural economics, has an idea — make cheese.

Not the bland, mass-produced American and mozzarella churned out in places such as Wisconsin, but perhaps an earthy guda, a tangy feta, or an extra-sharp cheddar with a taste specific and peculiar to the region of Pennsylvania where it is made.

Before you scoff at this suggestion, Bailey noted, consider the microbrewery craze that swept across the country and revolutionized the beer-making business in the last 20 years

or so. He believes the same thing could happen with cheese. Not long ago, Bailey explained, dominant beer brands such as Budweiser and Miller had the market cornered and there weren't many alternatives. Then small breweries started cropping up all over, making distinctive-tasting fermented beverages in small batches.

To be sure, the microbreweries will never displace beer giants such as Anheuser Busch — but many brands have earned uncommon customer loyalty, and through niche marketing they sell thousands of gallons of beer annually. Bailey believes "artisanal" or "designer" cheeses could have the same sort of market impact, and he said Pennsylvania — being the fourth largest dairy-producing state in the nation with many small herds and dairies — is in an ideal position to be on the cutting edge of the trend. The term "artisanal" comes from the word artisan, or craftsman, and relates to the skill needed to make exceptional cheese.

"I'm not suggesting that we try to compete with Kraft in the cheese business — we couldn't," Bailey said. "But if you look at the cheese industry, it is all moving out West. Immense factories use huge volumes of milk and make low-cost cheese. Only two cheeses in this country are made in great volume, American and mozzarella, with most of the latter going on pizza. Most of the cheese made in the United States is bland and boring. There is a tremendous opportunity for Pennsylvania dairy farmers to make distinctive, aged cheeses."

Dairy producers in other states are investigating this concept, too, according to Bailey, who noted that dairy farmers in Vermont have banded together to create a cheese association, and cheese from several different farms can be purchased on its Website.

"I think there is a market out there for really good farmstead cheese — artisanal cheese made in small batches," he said. "In Eastern Europe, farmers have three or four cows and make cheese at home. They take it to nearby markets to sell and the locals prefer it because the imported brands of cheese are too expensive."

Bailey believes Americans will consume more cheese now that scientists and doctors have realized that eating cheese is healthy.

"Americans are unsophisticated about cheese as compared to the French and other Europeans," he said. "Europeans eat much more cheese and they eat many more varieties. The European consumer is much more discriminating when it comes to cheese. But when the economy improves in this country and Americans' taste for cheese matures, the market will take off."

The question is, Bailey points out, how can small dairy farmers get into the farmstead cheese business? "Farmers must craft cheese in a low-cost way and keep marketing costs low," he said. "Cheese cooperatives and farmers' markets might be the answer."

To Scout Alfalfa Fields That Were Under Slush And Ice This Winter

The recent hard winter weather, for the most part, has been a benefit for agriculture.

Lancaster Agronomy Agent Bob Anderson explains the extreme cold and deep-freezing of the soil will probably have a very beneficial effect on soil structure, which has continued to be more compacted over the past several warm winters. The cold likely will result in reduced insect pest numbers for the next growing season as well.

One negative aspect of the winter weather was that low-lying fields were under water, slush, and ice for extended periods of time. This is a particular problem for alfalfa. Alfalfa needs to continue the respiration process even during cold weather, and those ponds of frozen slush did not allow that to happen. Usually when alfalfa fields have prolonged ice cover, the alfalfa winter survival is low. Check these fields after greenup. You may need to rotate into corn or another crop after first hay cutting.

Quote Of The Week:

"He who never walks except where he sees other men's tracks will make no discoveries."

— Author Unknown

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

WHO WOULD JESUS BOMB?

Background Scripture:

Mark 7:1-23.

Devotional Reading:

Psalms 51:10-17.

Valere and I have traveled around the world, visiting churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other places of worship. Even among the Christian sites we have visited there is an amazing diversity of architecture, ritual, and practice. It is difficult to imagine that all of these different beliefs, practices, and styles are all part of the same faith. Usually, these divergent factors result from a blend of faith and culture.

There is nothing wrong with this great diversity of beliefs and practices — with two important exceptions. One of these is thinking that our brand of Christianity alone is the "real thing," and the second exception is to forget to distinguish what represents the will of God and what is devised by human mind. These are deadly viruses that can infect the Church, destroying it from within rather than from without.

In Mark 7, Jesus is opposed by the scribes over the washing of hands before eating. The Jews, of course, did not know about bacteria in those days and could not appreciate that this practice was also good physical health measure. In their day it was purely ceremonial and symbolic. The practice in itself was probably a good way of disciplining their Hebrew faith. The problem, however, was that they failed to realize that this practice was not the heart of their faith. So they challenged Jesus, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?"

Human Precepts

Jesus' response was based upon a passage from Isaiah 29:13, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (7:6,7).

What can happen with any practice, belief, or ritual is that we invest it with divine authority when, at best, it represents precepts, human understanding of that authority. This legalistic approach makes it easier, because by keeping the minutia of our faith, we can more easily ignore God's commandments.

The precepts of human beings can easily become a substitute for God's commandments. People are often rather dogmatic about "the right way to worship," giving their method more energy and concern than the reality behind that method. Another example was the Church's response to Galileo, the brilliant 16th century scientist, who demonstrated Copernicus' theory that the earth revolves around the sun, not the reverse. The Inquisition labeled this theory heresy

and Galileo had to back down. How many other teachings, rules, and concepts are regarded as orthodox truth, when in fact they are little more than human precepts?

Often we have a choice between the commandments of God and the traditions of men when they conflict with one another. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in how we respond to Jesus' summation of the commandments: "... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." And, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk 12:6,7).

Human Exceptions

Never are we more ingeniously creative than when we are busy working out exceptions to this commandment. We rule that neighbors must be worthy of our love, that foreigners cannot be neighbors, that this rule does not apply to enemies. We justify violence and preach an eye-for-an-eye justice, adulterating our Christian witness.

We are at war again. Of all the justification that I see and hear regarding this war, I have heard virtually nothing about the relevance of Christian teaching. Authorities are quoted, but not Jesus Christ, although yesterday I saw this bumper sticker: "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" Good question! Jesus and the good news are about transformation, not obliteration.

As we have suspended some of our civil liberties "for the duration," shall we all also suspend the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Lancaster Farming

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—by—

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Lancaster Farming

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