

Lancaster Farming OPINION

(Continued from Page A10)

- Almost one in five local jobs can be credited to the agricultural industry.
- More than 7,000 people are employed in production agriculture.
- Lancaster County ranks number 1 in the country in the number of laying hens; number 2 in the country in the number of farms with sales greater than \$100,000; number 3 in the country in direct marketing food; number 4 in the country in total number of farms; and number 8 in the country in the number of dairy cows.
- Lancaster ranks number one in the state in the production of dairy, broilers, layers, cattle, calves, hogs, corn, hay, and tobacco.
- Each second, Lancaster County produces 90 eggs, 21 pounds of corn, 13 pounds of hay, 9 pounds of chicken, and 7

gallons of milk.

- Lancaster's ag image — not to mention gorgeous farms — represent a significant driver to our local tourism economy, generating more than 7 million tourists annually who spend 1.3 billion each year.
 - Farming is also a solid contributor to the plus side of our local tax base. For every \$1 of local taxes paid, farm services use \$0.07 — easily the lowest amount of any economic sector or use.
 - Farmland also serves a valuable role in groundwater recharge, allowing the much-needed rains to soak into our groundwater through the acres and acres of field and pasture.
- So, Lancaster's reign as Pennsylvania's most significant ag economy, and agriculture's contributions to all of us, simply cannot be challenged.
- Yet — and I am sorry to note there is a "yet" — while I can write ad nauseum on all sorts of positive economic impacts of agriculture, we also need to consider the following:
- Lancaster County has among the most expensive ag land in the entire country, while, at the same time, we have no ability to extract more from markets of

commodity crops such as corn, soybeans, and wheat.

- Lancaster County agriculture is confined to small fields with lots of urban neighbors, creating an increasing tension over co-existence.
 - Lancaster County agriculture cannot survive if our only way to make it on the farm is through frugal lifestyles and poverty level incomes.
- And the list of challenges goes on. For agriculture to continue its success, we as a community need to understand the challenges and change the message.
- You see, I contend that to the average Lancastrian, preserving our ag economy is synonymous with preserving our farmland — a notion I believe is not only simplistic but even potentially threatening to the future of ag.
- We need to expand the message, and we need to be vigilant that public policy follows suit. Some tactical examples:
- Preserve the farmer. What good is preserved farmland if we have no farmers to work it? In this regard, I am pleased to hold up the chamber's ag program as one of the answers. Funded in partnership with the County of Lancaster, this program gears its efforts to educating the farmer on sound business practices, educating the public on the overall significance of farming and the ag economy, providing networking opportunities for the local ag community to learn best practices, exchange ideas and learn from each other, and educate local elected officials on the issues of significance to the ag community:

1. Ensuring industrially-zoned land is every bit as protected as farmland. In Lancaster County, all land is precious. As vigilant as we are about farmland preservation, we need to be just as vigilant regarding industrially-zoned land. That is the land where the Tyson's will locate, where Pepperidge Farm will settle, where Sauder's Eggs will grow — all important elements of our ag economy.
2. Develop a more ag-friendly business environment. Our local regulations have to change with the needs of our local ag economy. Permitting on-farm businesses, lessening some of the excessive regulations, allowing for some more intensive and efficient farm practices, and promoting intergovernmental cooperation to ensure regional approaches to the solution are essential.
3. Create a Lancaster brand. The name Lancaster has great value for the image it creates. In that regard, tagging locally-grown products with such a brand will increase their value.
4. Finally, let's create a vision for the future. The Economic Development Company of Lancaster County is undertaking a strategic planning process for the future of economic development. It is vital that the agriculture interests are involved in the process. There will be plenty of opportunity for community input throughout the process, and the ag voice must be heard.

Let me end where I began — almost. I started this column by quoting the Scribner in noting, "agriculture is an important industry in Pennsylvania and Lancaster is a fertile place. Let it go at that."

Let me end by altering that just a bit . . . agriculture is an important industry in Pennsylvania, and Lancaster is a fertile place. Let's *not* let it go at that!

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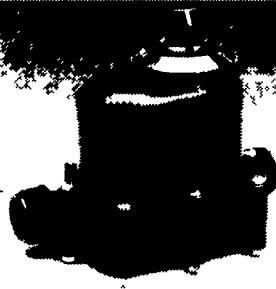
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