

THE DALLAS POST

EDITORIALS

Saving farmland enriches all of us

Caring families and the state have teamed up to assure that the Back Mountain retains some of the agricultural character that has shaped much of its history.

Two government programs — the Agricultural Security Act and the Farmland Preservation Program — allow owners of farms to protect the land from development. While there are some financial incentives for doing that, they are usually much less than the land's value if sold for subdivision into house lots. Thus, owners must care about preserving their land for the programs to work.

In Jackson Township, 2,000 acres have been preserved, much of it by families that work land that has been in the same hands for generations. The situation is similar in Lehman Township. Because it forms an Agricultural Security Zone, the land cannot be taken by government decree or subdivided, nor can the township adopt ordinances that restrict agricultural use.

Development and farming often are not good companions, and the profit to be made in building houses often displaces open land. That won't happen to a good deal of property here, and we all will be richer for that fact.

Responsible action in Jackson Township

Jackson Township officials got a rude surprise when six old gasoline tanks were found buried on property the township had bought for use as the site of a new municipal building. Now the township is faced with a \$230,000 expense for removing soil that had been tainted by gasoline that had leaked from the tanks. But it could be worse.

Had someone less responsible than the township purchased the property, the leaky tanks might still be in the ground, contaminating the soil and possibly water sources. Instead, the tanks have been removed along with more than 1,000 tons of polluted dirt. The job isn't over yet; adjoining property may hide more tanks.

This is an uncomfortable episode for the Jackson Township supervisors, and it will cost taxpayers something, too. But it's worth the aggravation and expense to remove potential harm from the ground.

Lower gas mileage standards will hurt

The Bush administration believes that lowering the standards automobile companies are held to will improve their competitiveness. But against whom? While we consider lower fuel economy goals, Honda and other manufacturers aggressively develop cars that will get 60, 80, even 100 miles per gallon of gasoline.

Encouraging domestic auto producers to aim lower does no favors for them, or for the rest of us. The United States today is as dependent on imported oil as it ever has been, and that dependency is growing. At the same time, we lack the capital to repair or improve our transportation systems and have made no serious effort to develop mass transit such as high speed trains between large cities.

There's one simple response to all these issues — a higher tax on gasoline, with the proceeds funneled into transportation programs. A higher tax — say 25 or even 50 cents per gallon — would offer several benefits:

- Because gasoline would be more expensive, auto manufacturers would produce more fuel-efficient cars with little prodding from the government.

- Sales of new cars would rise, as owners of old gas guzzlers trade in.

- Large amounts of money would flow to programs aimed at repairing and building highways, and developing mass transit. That would create jobs while enhancing society's overall efficiency.

- Alternative fuels would become inherently more attractive, spurring private companies to produce them.

Political conservatives prefer to believe that an unmanaged market is the ultimate in efficiency, but that is not always the case. By definition, conservatives protect the status quo rather than promote change. In the case of our energy wastefulness, a little direction from policy makers would offer long-term benefits far outweighing the short-term profit of relaxed standards.

Do you agree? Disagree?

Editorials are the opinion of the management of The Dallas Post. We welcome your opinion on contemporary issues in the form of letters to the editor. If you don't write, the community may never hear a contrasting point of view. Send letters to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612. Please include your name, address and a daytime phone number so that we may verify authenticity. The Post does not publish anonymous letters. We reserve the right to edit for length and grammar, but will call if we think editing might change the meaning.



Home on the range

Photo by Grace R. Dove

Letter

Thanks *The Dallas Post* for tribute of Dr. Lester Jordan

Editor,
On behalf of my entire family, please accept our sincerest thanks for the wonderful tribute to our father, Dr. Lester Jordan, which was printed in the Dallas Post on March 11, 1992. When Jean Hillard telephoned my mother a day or two after his death with the idea of a memorial, not just an obituary, we were, of course, very

pleased. The article surpassed our expectations. None of the information was even requested from our family, so, as expected, we assumed it was taken from articles written during earlier years.

Dad loved the Back Mountain Area. Everyone knows Rotary was his first love, and we were all very happy to see him achieve what he did during his Rotary years. He

never felt that the Fall Fair, the Library Auction or the Back Mountain Medical Center were work. These were simply community projects that needed to get done. He was called upon to plan or help with them, and since his community, his friends and his family would be directly affected by their completion, he went to work. No excuse would do; and more often

than not, he wouldn't allow others much leeway in offering excuses.

Of course, a memorial tribute is just that; and dad won't know of your article. He probably would have said, "that wasn't necessary", but it's a truly lovely tribute to our dad for all of us to keep.

Peggy (Jordan) Harvey

A. Case for conservation

Composting produces 'brown gold' for the yard

By ALENE N. CASE

With spring on the way, most of us are anxious to begin cleaning up our yards and tending our gardens. Stray plastic bags and burger boxes are appropriately thrown into the thrash. But those leaves that blew in from the neighbor's oak tree are gold in disguise. So, let's start refining that gold by making a compost pile.

Composting is one of the simplest ways to begin living in harmony with the land. Each year Americans discard 24 million tons of leaves and grass clippings. If that were composted, we could reduce our solid wastes by 18-20%. The cities of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre have been collecting leaves for several years and making the composted material available to citizens for use in their yards. But those of us who live in the suburbs generally have room on our property to do it ourselves. Thus, we can conserve energy (for transportation) and recycle nutrients from our own land.

I use the term "brown gold" when I refer to compost. There are several qualities that make it so valuable - quite apart from saving space in landfills. Compost can be used as a mulch as well as a fertilizer. Mulch retards soil erosion and retains moisture around plants. It also cuts down on the time and effort a gardener must spend pulling weeds and cultivating.

But, the primary use of compost is as a soil amendment. Nutrients from your own yard and garden can be used over and over again. It just doesn't make sense to bury these nutrients in a landfill or to dump them over the nearest bank. Compost can drastically reduce

the amount of commercial fertilizer you need for flower and vegetable gardens. It may not have as high a percentage of nitrogen or phosphorus, but compost has several advantages over the commercial fertilizers.

One of the most important is that it stays where you put it. Fertilizer tends to wash away in the first heavy rain before the plants can make use of it. These excess nutrients then cause rivers and lakes to become over-productive. And eventually, they create complex problems in estuaries, such as the Chesapeake Bay.

Commercial fertilizers also require the use of fossil fuels in manufacturing and transportation. They can actually damage soil if used continually. Composting needs no added fuel and tends to build up your soil instead of hurting it. In fact, one of the simplest uses for those leaves is to pile them in a spot where you want to have a garden and let them create the best top soil you've ever seen. It will take two or three years, but your patience will be richly rewarded.

OK, you say, you've convinced me. So, what do I do now? First, find a spot in your yard that isn't used much. Then build an enclosure with stakes and chicken wire. The size will be dictated by how much material you wish to compost. Remember that you will need to reach inside the enclosure for various reasons, so keep the fence low and - if it is large in area - oblong. If you prefer, commercial composting bins will look more orderly and make compost more quickly. Personally, I do not think the added expense is worth it.

Next, begin collecting compostable materials in the enclosure. Two items add up fast and are safe to use as amendments to any soil - leaves and bedding from small mammals. Pets such as rabbits or hamsters can greatly increase the fertility of the compost if their fecal pellets are added to the pile. Our gerbils also contribute by chewing up paper towel and toilet tissue rolls to make soft bedding which is then discarded in the compost pile. Dog and cat droppings carry too many pathogens to use in vegetable gardens but may be composted separately for use in flower beds.

Vegetable wastes from the kitchen generally compost well. (It is not a good idea to include meat scraps because they may cause an odor problem. Neighborhood pets may be attracted to the rancid meat and become ill from eating it.) Coffee grounds, tea bags (minus the strings), crushed egg shells, fruit rinds, vegetable trimmings and left-overs should go into the compost pile instead of into the garbage can or in-sink disposal.

Grass clippings and wood ashes can be added in moderation. Grass tends to compact so much that it is difficult for it to decompose. It is better to cut the grass often enough that it can simply decompose where it falls. Or, buy a lawn mower equipped with a "mulcher," which chops the grass more finely. If grass is put into the compost, mix it well with the other materials. Wood ashes would be great if they weren't such a problem. They contain lots of phosphate and trace elements that any good fertilizer should provide. But, we must remember that ashes are so alka-

line that our ancestors made soap from them for use in making soap. So, go easy on the ashes!

A compost pile is a small ecosystem. The important thing to remember in managing this ecosystem is that conditions must be favorable for the growth of bacteria, fungi and earthworms. That means that there must be enough moisture and oxygen. If it does not rain for a week or so in the summertime, water your compost pile. Water left from cooking vegetables or noodles can also be added to maintain adequate moisture.

The oxygen is mainly provided by "turning" the pile. About once a month the entire pile should be turned over. We do this by using a fork to move it from one end of the enclosure to the other. The chicken wire also allows for air circulation. If you know a fisherman, ask them for any bait they don't use. Earthworms burrow through the compost aerating it as they go. When your pile is a few years old, it will have so many earthworms in it that you may be tempted to start a bait business.

Another condition for growth, and therefore decomposition of your wastes is the correct pH. This can be maintained by adding a generous dusting of crushed limestone (also known as agricultural lime) to the pile after it is turned. The pile should be near neutral. If you are not sure about this, soil pH testers can be purchased at a garden shop.

If you begin your compost pile now, it is possible that you will be able to use it when you plant your tomatoes. Yes, this year's tomatoes. If not, be patient and keep trying. You will be rewarded with your very own brown gold.

Library news

Rebecca Webster's duck collection now on display

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

"Ducks Under Glass", that is the title of our new display at the library. We are featuring the collection of ducks borrowed from Rebecca Webster of Harveys Lake. Rebecca is 8 years old and she is being home educated at the second grade level. (a unique circumstance) Her teacher is her mother. There are more than 30 ducks in the display; the newest and most special one is a duck made from a bone by an Indian. This special duck is allowed to be sitting on the bridge in the display because he is important. Rebecca's brother had

a collection of penguins and she decided she would like to collect ducks.

When they lived in Ithaca, New York, there was a pond in the park near their home and she and her dad always fed the ducks there. Her brother Bob made a duck from pottery for her birthday which is also a bank. These ducks in the display have a special pond on which to swim and included in the display are ducks made of ceramic, basket, candle, glass, broom straws and a snow paper weight. There is a set of coasters, a soup mug, and three other mugs, one is Dad's special. There is a set of wooden

ducks which includes the whole family; and a hanging duck. There is a special card asking, 'Can you find?' and a list of the different variety of materials used to make these ducks.

Rebecca began her collection of ducks five years ago, when she was three and saved her pennies until she had enough to buy her first duck, a cuddly stuffed one. He was special and so well loved; he is showing the signs of wear. Needless to say, he is not in the library display. These ducks lend a welcoming sign to the spring season, which is just around the corner, and they will be at the library until April 8.

The library building and staff noted a very special day on Wednesday, March 4. It was seven years since we moved into our new renovated building and we are still thrilled to be here. This building is just what we needed to move our library into the next phase.

New book at the library: "Embrace the Serpent" by Marilyn T. Quayle and Nancy T. Northcott is as timely as tomorrow's headlines. Fidel Castro is dead. The Russians, anxious to regain their influence in the Western Hemisphere, and financed by a group of unknown origin, are determined to install their lackey as the new President of Cuba.

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