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Much learned and much to learn

By Earl Hance, MFB President

Spring already. Where did winter go? I had a list as long as my arm of things to do in the off-season and the list hasn't gotten any shorter for some reason. Well, there is a reason. Let me see, there was a meeting, then another meeting, and another, and another. You get the picture - and now here we are. Spring!

Now as the temperatures rise and the land dries out, your thoughts turn to planting season. And mine do too, well partly. But it seems the work of Farm Bureau continues. And so do I.

One issue of concern at present is the ability to construct poultry houses on the Eastern Shore. We have put together a coalition of those in the industry trying to reduce future problems and we hope solutions can be reached.

If you didn't know already, this past year there were three lawsuits challenging new construction of poultry houses. One of those cases, in Queen Anne's County, was heavily promoted by an animal rights organization. It is their wish to destroy the industry because of a concern for animal cruelty which is completely unfounded in my opinion. These groups have large amounts of money to use to accomplish their goals and poultry is not the only animal segment of our industry that they have set their sights on. Across the country, similar suits have been filed against hog, beef and dairy. Those cases will only get more numerous as time goes forward so we must be ever vigilant.

Two other cases brought forward were based on concerns of noise and odors. As we get more and more neighbors who didn't grow up around a farm and are not accustomed to the sights, sounds and odors we produce, more time will have to be spent on education. Both of these cases were unsuccessful but have triggered a wave of zoning amendments which we have to be very concerned about. In some cases these amendments would eliminate many farms from being able to construct new or additional houses. As we move forward, the coalition will be working on recommendations using best management practices to combat these zoning revisions.

This is just another example of what I have been preaching and you may be tired of hearing but WE NEED YOU! Farm Bureau's voice is only as strong as the members that will become involved. If your county calls on you to write letters, give input or attend a meeting, please come forward. These examples are not confined to the Eastern Shore but are coming to the forefront all across Maryland. Everyone needs to get active to help ensure a viable future for agriculture.

Another issue that came to light at my first American Farm Bureau Board of Directors meeting was the USDA announcement of reopening our borders to the importation of Canadian beef. Much discussion ensued by the major beef producing states of their concerns over consumer confidence. One thing the debate brought to light was the fact that we always ask for sound science when it comes to making laws or regulations and now the science says that Canada is a minimal risk for the exportation of BSE-infected beef products. If we were to speak out against this decision then in the future if there were BSE cases discovered in this country, how would we defend the industry against other countries closing their borders to us?

After lengthy discussion we decided to support the USDA decision even though we understand that our consumers have a very low, almost zero tolerance of BSE and science must be the basis for the decisions we make. It reminded me of the old saying, "Be careful what you ask for."

This is also true at the local and state level and sometimes science isn't going to agree with the way we think. But I believe that when we use sentiment and not fact to make decisions in the long run it always ends being a bad decision - well, at least on my farm.

So in the future, I'm going to try to remember this little example when making my own decisions whether it's on the farm or at Maryland Farm Bureau. If you see me straying, please remind me of what I wrote and I should heed my own advice. So long for now and maybe I'll see you in my travels.

THE ag agenda



By **Bob Stallman**, President
American Farm Bureau Federation®

Farm Spending: A Commitment to America

A wise person once said there's no abiding success without commitment. Commitment is the code that guides our daily lives, and relationships with our families, our neighbors and our country.

We view the 2002 farm bill as such a commitment. The law not only holds a measure of economic stability for our country's agricultural producers and our rural communities, but for all Americans it delivers food security, affordability and availability, all the while rewarding the stewardship of our natural resources. These are the types of worthy commitments on which our nation and our society are built.

Worthy Commitments

Through the 2002 farm bill our elected leaders approved a long-term commitment to our producers and it would be unfortunate for all producers and Americans to shift that policy before the end of its term. It would be hardest of all on farmers, who plan their investments and decisions based on a multi-year process, which like any successful business plan is most effective when free from unforeseen mid-stream surprises.

Unfortunately, due to the tight margins many farmers and ranchers face today, changing the current programs could cause major difficulty. Those margins are only becoming tighter due to the rising costs of seed, fuel and fertilizer. Unlike other professions, farmers simply cannot pass on new and added costs to consumers. Instead, the costs often make a direct hit to the farm family and rural America. Not only would the farmer be negatively affected by farm program cuts, but local equipment and fertilizer dealers and others working in rural America also would feel indirect impacts.

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