

## FARMING NOTES – NOVEMBER 2013

**Thanksgiving** – Timely perhaps to give thanks to all those who contribute to the success of our farming industry – farmers, educators and all those organizations and individuals that serve us in commercial, government and non-profit organizations. Secretary Vilsack on November 13<sup>th</sup> *"American agriculture achieved record exports once again in Fiscal Year 2013, and the period 2009-2013 stands as the strongest five-year period for agricultural exports in our nation's history. In fact, compared to the previous five-year period from 2004-2008, U.S. agricultural exports from 2009-2013 increased by a total of more than \$230 billion – and the average volume of bulk commodities exported increased by nearly four million tons per year during that same period. We need to remain focused on keeping up the incredible momentum we've seen over the past five years. First and foremost, Congress needs to pass a new Food, Farm and Jobs Bill to continue the trade promotion programs that helped American agriculture achieve these results."*

We know that our food prices are amongst the lowest, if not the lowest, in the world and food safety is also exemplary.

Yet we know there too many families who go hungry each month. Let us keep them in mind as we enjoy our turkey or family favorite.

**Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Annual meeting** – I had the privilege of attending the annual meeting at Hershey last week. An exciting moment for me at the PFB Members Banquet was hearing the Acting DEP Secretary Abruzzo say that he was determined to collaborate fully with his colleague Agriculture Secretary Greig. He made it clear that it was only right that they both should work together for the good of the most important industry in the Commonwealth – agriculture. Since increased regulations continue to be a concern in most farmer surveys across the country, this bodes well for us in Pennsylvania.

It also seemed fitting that the younger generation should receive increasing attention. The 2007 average age of U.S. farmers at 57.1 years old exceeded the 2010 median age of the U.S. labor force by 15.7 years. We know that succession provides many challenges but attracting young farmers to farms and to the overall agricultural industry, including education, must surely continue to be a priority. I also had the opportunity to discuss the proposed **Food Safety Bill**. The two major issues seem to be the testing of water supplies used for irrigating crops and washing produce and also the use of manure and untreated compost. Clearly there are food safety concerns but is

the level of risk being fully determined before requiring a significant amount of expensive testing surface water supplies and big delays in harvesting after applying manure?

**Sustainability** – the latest bandwagon. Clearly a vital aspect of attaining higher levels of productivity in the future. Target is a recent example of a retail giant to introduce a Sustainable Product Standard which they developed “in conjunction with industry experts, vendors and NGOs.” It may be confusing for consumers if companies use different criteria to define sustainable so education will be required to ensure understanding.

Food Waste a Great Paradox (opinion): The food wasted in the supply chain could feed as many as two billion people without any additional impact on the environment, the Food and Agriculture Organization says. Recent reports say we waste as much as 40% of the food produced, usually the figure is over 30%. What is the answer? Would food be even cheaper if we did not waste so much? How can we avoid so much waste in the whole chain from farm to fork?

### **Carbon**

**footprint from agriculture** – We often get a bad rap about the large carbon footprint that farming leaves. Yet over the last 50 year the carbon footprint per unit of production has gone down substantially due to dramatic yield increases in both livestock and crop plants. After all we used to have 22 million dairy cows in 1950 and we now have around 9 million with significantly higher production. Corn yields have quadrupled since the 40 bushel average in 1950. Annual growth in productivity in agriculture averaged 1.9% which was higher than the industrial figure of 1.3%. This higher level of productivity is forecast to continue with increasing focus on soil conservation and use of sustainable practices.

**Value of magazines** – In spite of the huge emphasis on digital media a 2012 ABM Media Channel Study found that 98% of farmers and ranchers continued to use agriculture magazines and newspapers – making it the number one resource for information. “While the importance of digital media will continue to increase, 88% of farmers and ranchers recognize the future importance of ag magazines and newspapers.”

**Manure not the leading cause of nitrogen pollution** to the Chesapeake Bay according to the October 2013 Chesapeake Bay report – only 16% of the 53% of nitrogen pollution but it does represent 35% out of the 54% phosphorus pollution(USEPA data. However agriculture is considered the leading source of pollution including sediment which “is the leading cause of

stream degradation in the Commonwealth, impairing over 5,600 miles of streams." DAA 11/25/2013