

# Weekly Perspective

## Other views

### Farm economy is in transition stage

By JOHN SLEDGE  
N.C. Farm Bureau Federation

This will be a transition year for the farm economy, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture William Lesher admits the financial outlook isn't good in the immediate future, but of the long term prospects, he indicates farmers can "look forward to moving up."

Farmers have looked forward to moving up for quite a few years now. It's been awhile since the farm economy as a whole had a good year. The outlook brightened somewhat at the beginning of this year with the announcement of the PIK program.

Livestock prices also had a runup. But, led by gold and silver, most commodity prices were hammered by falling oil prices and reduced chances of inflation.

It is rather ironic that agricultural commodities never seem to fully share in the stock market boom or the price runups in gold and silver, but as soon as these markets sell off,

down go farm commodity prices too.

The reason farm commodities are buffeted so much now by the other markets is that they don't have strong fundamentals of their own right now. We are basically in an oversupply situation with way too much in storage, and until that is changed, farm commodity prices may not show strong direction of their own.

We do, however, seem to be in a bottoming pattern. Here again, the top of a price move seems to be gone in a blink and the bottom lasts forever. A private forecast from the American Farm Bureau Federation indicates farm income this year will improve from last year's level of \$19.5 billion dollars to \$20.5 billion dollars.

Not much of an increase. Maybe that is why USDA calls it a transition year.

If we are indeed in a transition from bad to good, then maybe the year won't seem so long.

### Longitudinal travel attractions

Perquimans County lies between 76 degrees 10 minutes and 76 degrees 35 minutes of west longitude. Many places fall within this position on earth, sharing our noon. Others, near the 104th degree of east longitude on the opposite side of the globe, experience midnight to our noon.

Were it possible to leave Perquimans heading due north and circumnavigating the world, the continents of North America, Asia, Antarctica, and South America would be seen. Some of the places along this route are described hereafter.

Recently celebrating its tercentenary, Norfolk, Va., has long served Perquimans as a market and shopping center. Today, the Norfolk area is a major source of new residents for the county.



Across the great natural harbor of Hampton Roads is the peninsula formed by the James and York rivers. At Yorktown is the battlefield where Washington's defeat of Cornwallis in 1782 convinced Britain to allow the thirteen colonies their independence.

Where the Potomac enters Chesapeake Bay is Northumberland County, Va., where George Durant, one of the first settlers of Perquimans, was married in 1659.

Up the Chesapeake is Baltimore, where our national anthem was written. That great city was long a favorite place for Perquimans' merchants to order their stocks of goods.

### Looking back

**LANDING ENTERS RACE FOR MAYOR:** Emmett Landing filed his candidacy here this week for the office of Mayor of the Town of Hertford. Landing, a popular civic-minded citizen, is active in civic clubs and community.

He was a key man in the development of the Perquimans Recreation playground, furnishing labor and much of the materials on his own. The Hertford Jaycees presented Landing a special award for his outstanding work on the recreation park at the club's annual banquet in February.

Candidates who have filed to date are incumbent Mayor V.N. Darden, who is seeking re-election, and Emmett Landing, W.A. (Billy) White, Henry C. Sullivan, and Commissioner incumbent W.F. Almsley.

**LOCAL GROUP AT CLEANERS MEETING:** Mr. and Mrs. Tom

Lancaster, Pa., was the home of President James Buchanan and of Thaddeus Stevens. The latter's harsh attitudes and influence over Congress led to the imposition of rigorous federal control over the Reconstruction South.

Further north is Syracuse, N.Y., on the old Erie Canal, a reminder of the era of internal improvements. (Perquimans, too, caught the improvement fever in the early 1800s, her favorite schemes being swamp drainage and the opening of Roanoke Inlet.)

Past the eastern end of Lake Ontario, our longitude continues through even colder and more barren northern Canada before reaching the great icy ocean at the top of the world.

Striking the North Pole, our longitude then meets its sister longitude turning south across the back side (some might say the backside) of the world.

Now the path crosses Siberia near the city of Irkutsk; over Mongolia and the emptiness of the Gobi Desert; and through the infamous Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The most interesting spot along that path is probably Singapore, one of the world's most important and most humid ports.

Beyond the exotic island of Sumatra is the Indian Ocean. There, about 700 miles west of Perth, Australia, is that spot exactly opposite Perquimans on the earth. (Next time you're pulling those long-rooted weeds, don't yank too hard; the Indian Ocean might start pouring into your garden.)

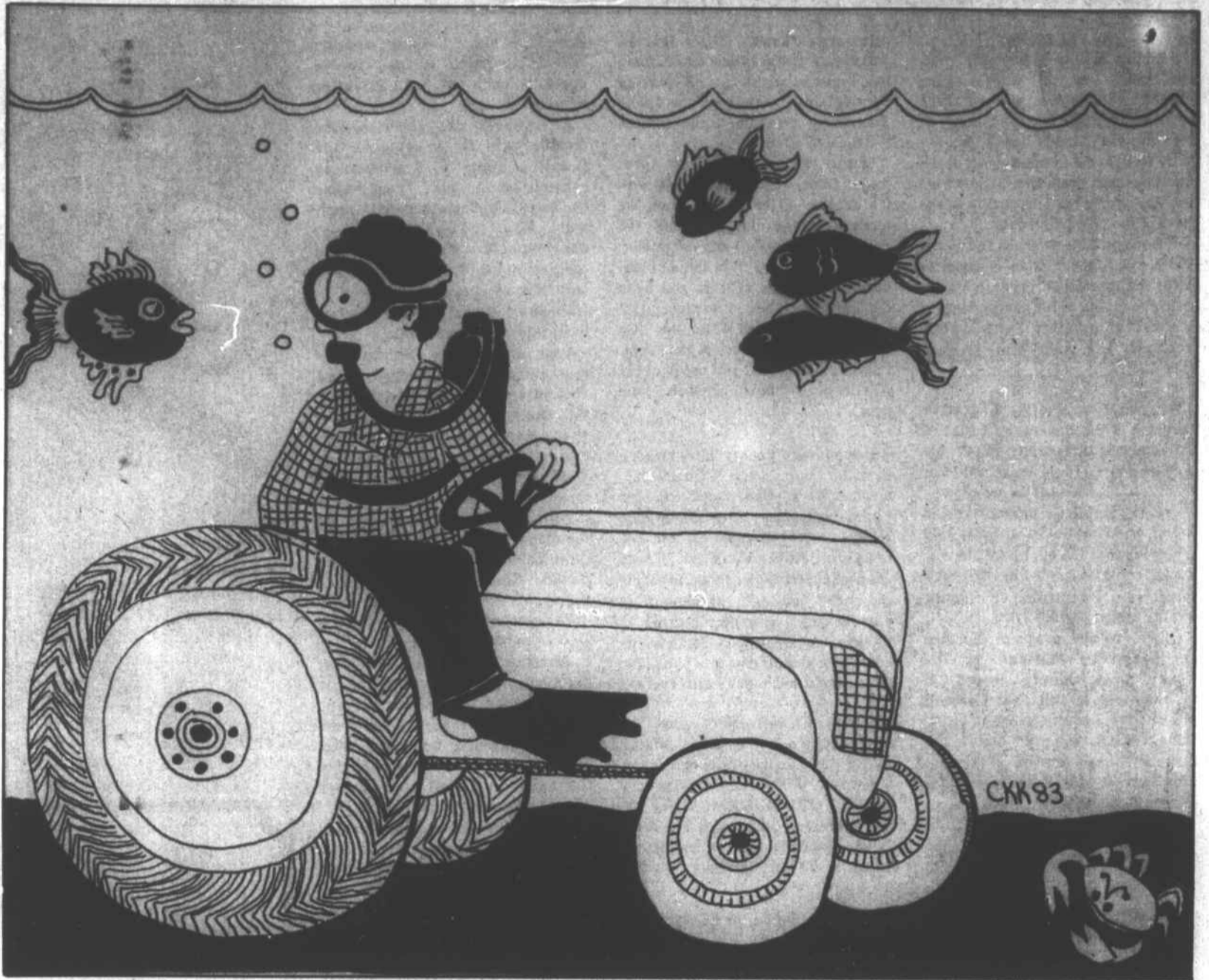
Crossing the wastes of Antarctica, our longitude passes through the Pacific, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Cuba.

Both Exuma Island (once a frequent port of call for Perquimans vessels) and Ocracoke Inlet (a principal entrance to our system of sounds) lie almost due south of our county.

Harrell, owners of Cannon Cleaners here and George W. James, Jr., cleaner and spotter for the company, attended the National Institute of Dry Cleaning Convention and Exhibit in Washington, D.C. over the weekend.

**BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT:** Lieut. and Mrs. Bill Batts of Norfolk, Va. announce the birth of a daughter, born Saturday, March 30, 1983, at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. Lieut. Batts is the son of Mrs. Frank Jessup of Hertford.

**TWO LOCAL NURSES GRADUATE AT EC:** Mrs. Marie S. Elliott and Mrs. Laura W. Matthews were among the 15 nurse graduates of the Elizabeth City School of Practical Nursing graduated in March. The exercises were held at the First Methodist Church with H.A. Grual of the Elizabeth City Board of Education and Dr. Robert L. Poston of Winfall.



Plowing the rain-swelled fields of Perquimans

### Petty shared wit and wisdom

It's a real shame that everyone in the county could not hear the keynote speaker at the Northeastern District Extension Homemakers' annual meeting, held last week at Perquimans County High School.

For the 310 Extension Homemakers who attended the meeting, it was a real treat to hear Dr. Charles Petty, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Citizens Affairs. If you ever get a chance to hear him, by all means do!

With bits of down to earth humor mixed with heartwarming stories, Petty presented a message filled with unforgettable wit and wisdom.

With simple statements like, "Touch your children till the day

you die," and "Children are more important than grass," and "Marriage is like the stock market — it goes up and down," Petty gave the homemakers some

Petty told the group, "If you are going to have quality in your life, you are going to have to concentrate on having quality in your family."

To achieve quality and enrichment in your family life, Petty suggested three ways. One way is to realize that relationships are more important than things. "Use things as tools to enrich relationships," Petty commented.

Another way to add quality to the family is to show affection. "Tell them you love them and you absolutely must touch them (your family) until the day you die," said the former Baptist minister.

Understanding is a third important factor in adding quality to the family. "Knowledge is power and if you don't understand, you'll just fumble along," said Petty. Listening to what family mem-

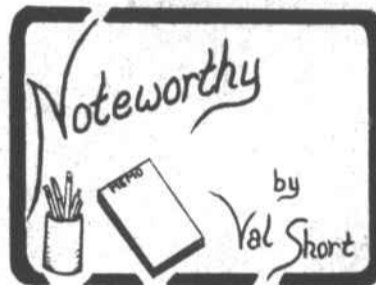
bers were not saying could help one achieve understanding, according to Petty.

Petty told the group that what happens to society is directly determined by what happens in the family.

In one of his many interesting and humorous illustrations of his points, Petty told about the church track team, which he coaches in Raleigh. He said he tells the team that the hand-off is the most important part of a relay race — not the speed.

He said that in life also, the hand-off is the most important thing. "The hand-off is the critical thing in our culture — what are you passing on to your children?"

Petty passed on quite a bit of wisdom during his brief message to the Extension Homemakers and I am sure each of them felt, as did I, that he had indeed enriched their lives.



realistic suggestions and observations to help improve the quality of their lives.

Following the theme of the District Homemakers meeting, "Adding quality to your life,"

### Facing South

a syndicated column:  
voices of tradition  
in a changing region

**KERVILLE, TX** — Since 1892, the tall, skinny, ornately trimmed mansion has stood on a hill overlooking this peaceful south Texas town. It looks almost like something from a child's Halloween drawing, perched precariously on the pointed summit of the hill.

For many years, the house has been deserted, its weathered gray planks still holding firm under the storm clouds which often gather around the hilltop.

Real mysteries as well as imagined ones cluster about this old landmark. They originated many years ago — old-timers say about 1915 — when the house's graceful curved staircase was inexplicably removed, chopped up and burned by the owners, a reclusive family named Meyer-schmidt, who seldom left the hilltop except after dark.

No one ever saw the family move out, but not long after the stairs were burned, a "For Rent" sign appeared by the road at the bottom of the hill. An elderly caretaker lived in a small cottage on the seven-acre property.

He was in charge of renting the house, but never disclosed to the curious townspeople where the owners had gone or why the top floor — where the bedrooms were located — had been shut off in so eccentric a manner.

Several families moved in and out over the next several years. No one wanted to stay long in a house where the bedrooms must be reached in-

conveniently by means of a rope ladder in the closet.

The caretaker died after a while, and the house remained empty and untended.

In the late 1940s, people on the north side of town began to notice a light flashing on and off in the shut-off top story of the old mansion. Children were prickly-skinner with excitement; their parents were mystified.

So many people reported seeing the strange light, flashing on and off around twilight, that it could not be dismissed as a trick of the imagination.

Finally, the neighbors decided to ask the police to look into the matter. And so, late one afternoon, Officers Johnston and Packwood — long-time friends and colleagues — climbed up to the steep hill and ascended the rope ladder to the legendary top story of the old house.

The bedroom furniture, heavily coated with dust, remained in the old chambers; even the covers were still in place. There was no sign of life, except for a mouse which scurried across the floor. A door or two slammed in the wind; a loud creaking noise persisted. "These old houses just creak," said Johnston, as the two officers continued in their search.

In one of the bedrooms, Packwood discovered a yellowed sheet of paper lying in the dust on an old chest of

drawers. It proved to be a note written by the daughter of the family, and read as follows: "I, Marion Meyerschmidt, am about to take my life by hanging myself, and I hereby declare that this will be my final act." It was signed and dated April 24, 1915 — just about the time the stairs were shopped out and burned.

Officer Packwood wrapped the note up and pocketed it gingerly. "We'll need to check this out to see if there's any record of her death at the courthouse," he said.

But Marion Meyerschmidt's fate was never resolved. The courthouse

held no record of her death; no grave or headstone was ever discovered on the property. Some surmised that her parents took her body with them when they moved.

The hilltop property is not valuable, and its ownership is being disputed in court by several parties claiming to be heirs. The county historical society hopes to raise money to buy the home and restore it as a town museum — surely a fitting role for an old landmark.

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freelance  
Kerrville, TX

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