

**Editor's
Notebook**



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Do-It-Yourself Funerals

Did you know that if a member of your family died and you decided to bury the body on your own farm that in many areas of North America you would be guilty of a crime?

Many people would rather handle their own dead, both for emotional and for financial reasons. Turning a loved one's body over to an impersonal funeral home for a fee of thousands of dollars just doesn't sit right with a growing number of people.

FARM SHOW has reported in the past on the efforts of Reverend Forrest Hayes who publishes do-it-yourself manuals (geared to each local area) on how to conduct your own funeral without running afoul of the law (Contact: Burial, P.O. Box 1402, Middlebury, Ind. 46540).

We recently heard about another group, the non-profit Funeral and Memorial Societies of America (FAMSA) based in Hinesburg, Vt., which is dedicated to promoting a "consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral". FAMSA has made it its business to monitor the funeral industry full-time.

The group points out that the U.S. and Canada are the only countries in the world where embalming is widely promoted. "It is rarely done in most other developed countries. Visitations can be held for 2 to 3 days with no danger to the public before a body must be embalmed or buried," it says.

FAMSA can provide detailed information about how to care for your own dead which is permitted in 42 states and all Canadian provinces if you follow certain procedures. For instance, in many areas you can bury your own dead but you still need to have a funeral director in attendance to supervise. And to bury on your own land, zoning clearances may be required.

A new, comprehensive, 450-page handbook, "Caring For The Dead", will be available from FAMSA next fall. The group already has a web site in operation.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Funeral and Memorial Societies of America, P.O. Box 10, Hinesburg, Vt. 05461 (ph 800 765-0107 or 802 482-3437; fax 5246; website <http://www.funerals.org/famsa>).

Ostrich Industry Lays An Egg

The bubble has burst for ostrich and emu farmers in North America, according to several recently published reports.

Auction prices collapsed in the past year from thousands of dollars down to less than a few hundred dollars. In some cases, no buyer can be found at any price.

"Thousands of emus are roaming the Texas countryside, set free by ranchers unwilling to spend another dime on feed," the Los Angeles Times recently reported. "Hundreds of others have been allowed to starve to death, their emaciated remains found in breeding pens that once drew eager investors."

In a Fort Worth suburb this summer, police caught two physician brothers, Stephen and Russell Vinson, putting their flock "to sleep" with an aluminum baseball bat after trying to sell - or even give away - the exotic birds.

In Alberta, Canada, one big bird rancher goes around showing off what he calls his \$40,000 boots. That's how

much he originally paid for an ostrich that he later turned into shoe leather.

All that's a far cry from a few years ago when breeding pairs were bringing up to \$60,000 and unhatched chicks up to \$4,000. So what happened?

The problem with the industry is apparently a basic one: the meat never caught on at the supermarket. Only a handful of restaurants and specialty stores carry it and, so far, it's proved too expensive and exotic for mainstream tastes.

In the current shakedown, the get-rich-quick schemers are being weeded out from the true believers.

One of the latter is Gary Nastiff, a Denton, Texas, based businessman who sells a line of products made with emu oil. He's found a market for his products even though the market value of the birds has plummeted.

Another source of optimism is the Canadian Emu Cooperative Inc. (CEMU) in Ontario, which predicts a shortage of birds in Canada within less than a year due to the number of producers getting out.

However, for most producers the recent collapse of the industry seems to show that industry promotion was just another pyramid scheme that paid off only for people who got in early.

"The only way anyone made money in the business was by selling birds from one rancher to another," concluded the Times. "Indeed, it was not in the short-term interests of the industry to even think about moving to a consumer market as long as the goose could still lay the golden egg for new investors."

Still Our Favorite Calendar

There's no shortage of farm calendars out there this time of year but, for our money, the best one is still the Classic Farm Tractors calendar produced by John Harvey.

John came up with the idea 9 years ago when he was a PR man at Dupont. When he left the company he took the calendar with him and year after year he has continued to track down an eye-popping collection of restored tractors.

This year is no different. One that caught our eye was a 1918 Square Turn tractor - a 3-wheel, tricycle-type tractor with the ability to turn short and square by having one wheel go forward while the other turns back. It has a live power hoist at center for a moldboard plow. Only three Square Turns are known to exist. The one featured is owned by the Elkhorn Valley Historical Society in Norfolk, Neb. It was purchased at an estate auction in Michigan for \$19,500 in 1991.



1918 Square Turn Tractor

Other tractors featured this year include a 1911 Titan, a 1948 Intercontinental C-26, a 1961 Cockshutt 580, a 1939 John Deere BNH, a Sheppard Diesel SD-2, and a 1953 Big Four. Owners are listed along with facts and figures on each tractor.

There are still some copies of the 1998 Calendar available for \$9 plus \$2 S&H. Call 1-800-888-8979 or send a check to Classic Tractor Fever, Box 437, Rockland, Del. 19732. (In Canada, please order by phone or send U.S. Funds).

What One Business Publication Is Saying About Agriculture

Farm equipment manufacturers have been making hay throughout the 1990's. Deere & Co., Case Corp., and Agco Corp. have recently enjoyed rising sales and fat operating margins: an average of 13%, compared with about 7% five years ago. But don't bet the farm on this industry. USDA projects 1997 farm profits to drop nearly 22%. Agco recently told investors to expect a 2% drop in North American tractor sales in the first half of 1998.

Since the New Deal, farmers have relied on government handouts to help them through downturns. But last year's so-called Freedom to Farm Act will get farmers off the dole by 2002. Some analysts think that without Uncle Sam's safety net, many family farms may go south. This could spell bad news for Deere and Case. An estimated 15% to 20%, respectively, of those companies' projected 1997 earnings come from financing farmer's equipment. Manufacturers' margins could get squeezed as small farms consolidate. Larger conglomerates will drive harder bargains when buying.

There's also an Asia factor. Not only will these countries be importing less equipment, but the currency crisis there will curb demand for US grain exports.

Case and Agco stocks are already down 10 to 15% since last fall. Deere remains near its high but the stock could fall as much as 20% in the next 12 months. However, Deere has made efforts to diversify away from agriculture in recent years. Its health care and credit business now account for 22 percent of total operating profit. Deere Credit finances non-Deere purchases like recreational boats and trailers and Deere's for-profit health care business covers 300,000 patients, only 25 percent of whom are Deere employees. (**Forbes**)

Dutch Farmers Face Stiff New Regulations

If you think the government is heavily involved in your farm operation, you might want to consider the amount of regulation faced by Dutch farmers. A new program requires farmers to keep accurate records of all mineral imports *added to* and also *taken away from* the soil on their farms. The goal is to ensure that there is no nutrient loss to farm land, and also no excessive application of manure, fertilizer or other chemicals. Fines have been fixed for farms that exceed the maximum permitted loss of N, P and K.

Liquid manure is seen as the major culprit. The upshot of the new program is that farmers will have to test every single load of manure for N, P and K content. A sampling device has been developed that automatically collects a number of samples from liquid slurry tanks as they're being filled. The sample bottles are then sent to a laboratory for analysis. The cost of having a tank-load tested is expected to be between \$30 and \$40, which means it will be beneficial to use the largest manure tanks possible. The automatic manure testing device sells for about \$15,000. (*Excerpted from the British farm magazine Farm Contractor*)

How Old Is Your Dog?

The first year of a dog's life is equal to 15 in a human's. The second year is the equivalent of nine more years of human age, making the dog 24 years old. After that, each year equals four more years of human life. So when a pup has been with its owner for 16 years, its age would be equivalent to an 80-year-old human. (**Dear Abby**)

Life Begins At 80

I have good news for you. The first 80 years are the hardest. Once you reach 80, everyone wants to carry your baggage and help you up the steps. If you forget your name or anybody else's name, or an appointment, or your own phone number, or a promise to be three places at the same time, or can't remember how many grandchildren you have, you need only explain that you are 80.

Being 80 is a lot better than being 70. At 70, people are mad at you for everything. At 80, you have a perfect excuse no matter what you do. If you act foolishly, it's your second childhood. Everybody is looking for symptoms of softening of the brain.

If you survive until you are 80, everybody is surprised that you are still alive. They treat you with respect just for having lived so long. Actually, they seem surprised that you can walk and talk sensibly.

So please, folks, try to make it to 80. It's the best time of life. People forgive you for anything. If you ask me, life begins at 80. (**Anonymous**)

**Catch Up On What
You've Missed!**

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