ultimately create problems for the long-term viability of farming. Addressing agriculture requires that we approach zoning as “zoning for agriculture” and not as zoning that threatens agriculture because of its legal exemption. If the agricultural community wants “good zoning,” it will have to participate in the development and implementation of zoning regulations. Public participation is a legal requirement of the local zoning process. Community residents have a right to create, tailor, or object to zoning. And so the one certainty we can state about zoning and agriculture is this: if agriculture is to have a say in whether zoning is “good” or “bad,” agriculture’s understanding of participation in the zoning process is imperative.

### Regional Agricultural Law Conferences Planned

“Farmers and Neighbors: Legal Issues” is the theme for two conferences planned by OSU’s Agricultural & Rural Law Program and OSU Extension. The conferences will take place on January 12 at the Der Dutchman restaurant in Waynesville and on January 14 at the Miami Valley CTC in Trotwood. The programs, which will run from 3-9 pm, will include sessions on nuisance law, premises liability, fence law, noxious weeds, drainage law, living with neighbors without litigation, and an overview of the legal system. For further information, visit the Agricultural & Rural Law Program’s website at www.abe.osu.edu/programs/adlaw or contact Peggy Hall at (614) 247-3989.

### 2003 Policy and Outlook Meetings

The Ohio State University Agricultural Outreach and Policy Program is based in the Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics. It features a regular series of information meetings updating the status of food, farm, and environmental policies and markets related to those areas. Following is the schedule for meeting this year’s series. For more information contact your local Extension office or go to: http://ede.osu.edu/program/outlook.

- **November 20**: Chillicothe, evening
- **November 24**: Marysville, 6:30 pm
- **November 25**: Greenwich, 7:30 am
- **December 3**: Willard, 11:00 am
- **December 3**: Archbold, evening
- **December 4**: Van Wert, morning
- **December 4**: New Bremen, lunch
- **December 4**: Piqua, evening
- **December 8**: Lancaster, lunch
- **December 8**: Mt. Vernon, evening
- **December 11**: Urbana, 10:00 am
- **December 17**: Canton, 9:30 am
- **December 17**: Wooster, evening

### Is Zoning Good for Agriculture?

Land is almost always the major asset of an agricultural landowner. Zoning is almost always controversial because it has the potential to interfere with that asset. Historically, agriculture in Ohio has viewed zoning negatively, as an unwanted regulation of private property rights. But current demands and competing uses for land are forcing Ohio agriculture into zoning issues. As more and more people want to own, develop, or live near farmland, agricultural landowners may want to consider the question of what zoning can do for agriculture.

Zoning issues are prevalent in many rural Ohio communities today. For example, one county in southern Ohio is attempting to institute zoning to address the changes caused by substantial increases in residential development in the county’s rural areas. Residents of a zoned central Ohio township have fought out their frustrations with a zoning ordinance that allows large subdivision developments in the agricultural area. A central Ohio county faced with the prospect of a landfill is trying to quickly enact zoning, though it’s failed on several occasions in the past. In northern Ohio, one township has recently approved a zoning ordinance that creates agricultural districts in which agriculture is the primary use permitted in the area. These examples illustrate how zoning can have significant impacts on a rural area, and how important it is for the agricultural community to understand zoning and its implications.

Legally, zoning is an attempt to make land use orderly and consistent for the purpose of protecting the health and safety of the community. Individual property rights are circumscribed for the good of the “big picture”—the public at large. The zoning process divides land into “districts” or “zones” according to lands. Within a district, only those land uses and activities designated as permissible by the zoning ordinance may take place. Permitted land uses might also be subject to restrictions concerning setback requirements, maximum building size, or minimum lot size, to name a few.

Zoning can’t exist in a rural area unless the residents of that area approve a proposed zoning ordinance by a majority vote. Even where zoning exists, however, agriculture receives unique treatment under Ohio’s zoning laws. The law provides that a county or township cannot, through its zoning regulations, prohibit the use of land for agricultural purposes or require building permits for agricultural buildings, with a few exceptions. This “agricultural exemption” protects agriculture from being “zoned out” of a township or county. The exemption ensures that agriculture can have a place in the Ohio landscape as long as there are agricultural landowners. It does not, as some believe, exempt agriculture from all zoning regulations.

The disadvantages of zoning are well known to agricultural landowners. Zoning limits what a landowner can do with the land, with the exception of the agricultural exemption. For an owner of farmland surrounded by development, zoning restrictions can affect the profits to be gained from selling the land for development. Procedural requirements for obtaining zoning permits and administrative approvals can be burdensome, frustrating, and costly. Even where zoning exists, it may be inadequate or unfairly implemented.

But has agriculture in Ohio seriously debated the benefits of zoning? Zoning can create agricultural areas that protect farming from conflicting land uses. It can separate agriculture from non-farm residential development, Wal-Mart superstores, and shopping centers—land uses that make farming more difficult, more expensive, or more subject to scrutiny. Zoning can create certainty in land availability, a benefit increasingly important for a state that is second in the nation for conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses.

Zoning won’t be good for agriculture, though, if it doesn’t address agriculture. Research indicates that the “best” zoning is based upon a comprehensive assessment of a community’s needs and resources, and a clear foresight of the community’s future. However, most zoning regulations in Ohio fail to consider the needs of agriculture and leave agriculture to coexist with other land uses that are used for e-mail correspondence. Production (crop and livestock) record keeping and word processing were reported by 76 percent of computer users. The use of the Internet for information gathering and transactions is now an important application of the farm computer: Nearly 55 percent of farmers reported price tracking on the Internet, 29 percent performed online banking or bill paying, 26 percent reported the purchase of farm inputs using the Internet, 16 percent traded stocks, bonds or other financial instruments online, 13 percent sold farm products over the Internet, 9 percent reported online trading of agricultural commodity contracts, and 73 percent use the Internet for general information searches. In summary, computer adoption is increasing on farms, but perhaps not as fast as for off-farm individuals.

### Farm Management Update

Ohio State University Extension Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics

Quarterly Publication of Ohio State University Extension
Winter 2003–2004

It is always difficult to capture a mission in a few words, but a reasonable encapsulation of agriculture’s mission since its emergence approximately 10,000 years ago is “to provide people with the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter.” However, this mission mostly has been attained in advanced economies, such as the United States. Most strikingly, the share of expenditures that U.S. consumers spend on U.S.-produced farm commodities used for food was only 1.8% in 2000, the last year for which data exists. Alternatively, little can happen on the farm anymore, short of a severe and widespread drought, that can noticeably impact U.S. consumers.

Given this situation, the relevancy of agriculture in the U.S. increasingly has come under scrutiny. Some have argued, such as Dr. Steven Blank in his widely-discussed book, The End of Agriculture in the American Portfolio, that agriculture will disappear from the United States. While this scenario is within the realm of plausible outcomes, a more likely outcome in this author’s view is that the two-thirds decline in real farm prices since 1910 will create new economic opportunities for U.S. agriculture. Three potential examples of the new economic dynamics at work follow.

Opportunity: Medical Care

As the United States became wealthier, concerns about the environment and the economic resources devoted to addressing these concerns have increased. Farming’s impact on the environment is omnipresent as over half of the 1.5 billion acres of nonfederal land in the United States is used for farm-related activities. The growing importance of environmental programs in the social compact known as the farm bill documents that the day is drawing closer when the general citizenry of the United States will view their well-being as impacted more by farmers as environmental stewards than as producers of farm products used for food. This shift in consumer wants will allow agriculture to sell its environmental assets, such as open space, the ability to improve air and water quality, and potentially even scenic views of corn, cows, and barns.

Summary

The decline in farm prices is usually seen as a bane by farmers, farm leaders, and the farm press. However, these declining prices generate new opportunities, including medicinal foods, energy and industrial feedstock, and environmental benefits. These new opportunities will expand agriculture’s scope beyond the basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing. Thus, a more inclusive view of the hopes and aspirations that the general citizens of a country of wealth have for agriculture in the 21st Century is “bioresources for a Healthy World.”

The authors thank Constance Jackson, Allan Lines, and Luther Tweeten for their comments on and insights on earlier versions of this paper.

A version of this article will appear in THE FUTURIST, September-October 2003 (www.wfli.org). This version emphasizes the changing relationship between agriculture and the U.S. economy and the implications of this changing relationship for the U.S. economy in the 21st Century.

Carl Zoladz

McComrick Professor of Agricultural Marketing and Policy

Ohio Farm Computer Usage

Computers have become an everyday tool for office workers and managers in many sectors of the economy. The U.S. Department of Commerce reported that in 2000 about 54 percent of the U.S. population used a computer at least occasionally. One might question if a parallel adoption of computers has occurred on farms. This research addresses this question using data from a March 2003 mailed survey of a random sample of all Ohio farmers.

Just over 44 percent of sampled farmers responded that they use an office computer in their farm business (Table 1). This is up from 32.1 percent in 1991. The adoption rate varied significantly by size of farm, age of operator, level of operator education, and with off-farm employment of the operator. For farms in the smallest sales category, only 36 percent of the operators had adopted an office computer. However, for farms with over $500,000 of sales, computer adoption was nearly 72 percent. Computer adoption tended to be negatively related to the age of operator. The average adoption rate for farmers who were age 50 or younger was significantly greater than for farmers older than 50. About 54 percent of farmers 50 or younger had adopted a computer, whereas only 39 percent of farmers older than 50 had adopted. On the other hand, there was a positive association between operator education level and computer adoption. Just over 31 percent of those with high school education or less had adopted a computer, but more than 67 percent of those with a post high school education were computer adopters.

Table 1. Computer adoption, computer usefulness, and computer usage levels by various farm and farmer characteristics.

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<tr>
<td>Full Sample</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross farm sales</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000–99,999</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000–249,999</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,000–499,999</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over $500,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age of operator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 or Less</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–50</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>46.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level of operator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate Education or Degree</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operators Working off the Farm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
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Farmers who have adopted computers were asked to indicate the extent to which the computer has improved the business either by saving time or providing better business information. Five response categories were offered, where 1 = Not at all and 5 = Very Much.

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Marvin T. Bate and D. Lynn Forster
Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics

Computer adoption was significantly lower for farm operators who did not work away from the farm (38%) than for those who worked away from the farm (54%). Perhaps the higher adoption for farmers working away from the farm is due to the computer exposure/training that they receive in their off-farm employment and their transfer of this technology to the farm business. The survey farmers were also asked to indicate the extent to which they felt the computer had improved their business either by saving time or providing better information (Table 1). Farmers responding to a five-item scale, where one represented no improvement, two indicated little improvement, and five represented much improvement. The average response for all computer adopters was 3.5. Average usefulness score increased with gross sales, and was significantly higher for farmers with post high school education levels. Farmers working full time on the farm also reported higher usefulness scores for computer use. Usefulness scores increased for younger operators, and were significantly high for the farmers who were 35 or less. Farmers who have adopted computers were asked to indicate those tasks for which the computer was used. Financial record keeping was the primary computer task in 1991 and remains so today. Eighty-nine percent of farmers with computers used their computer for financial record keeping. More than 76 percent indicated they

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continued on page 4
Agriculture’s Mission in the 21st Century: “Bioresources for a Healthy World”

It is always difficult to capture a mission in a few words, but a reasonable encapsulation of agriculture’s mission since its emergence approximately 10,200 years ago is “to provide people with the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter.” However, this mission mostly has been attained in advanced economies, such as the United States. Most strikingly, the share of expenditures that U.S. consumers spend on U.S. produced farm commodities used for food was only 1.8% in 2000, the last year for which data exist. Alternatively, little can happen on the farm anymore, short of a severe and widespread drought, that can noticeably impact U.S. consumers.

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Furthermore, its share likely will increase from 4% to 18%. The decline in farm prices is usually attributed to the growing economic attractiveness of farm products as a source for energy and industrial feedstock.

Summary

The decline in farm prices is usually seen as a bane by farmers, farm leaders, and the farm press. However, these declining prices generate new opportunities, including medicinal foods, energy and industrial feedstock, and environmental benefits. These new opportunities will create new economic opportunities for U.S. agriculture in the 21st Century is “bioresources for a healthy world.”

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Relative to 1991 benchmarks for
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www.aede.osu.edu/programs/arl or
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Peggy Kirk Hall
Director of Agricultural
& Rural Law
Swank Program in Rural-
Urban Policy

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Procedural requirements to obtain
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and costly. Even where zoning
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But has agriculture in Ohio seriously
benefited from the local or national
zoning process? Zoning can create
disproportionate and unfair
exclusions for the agricultural
sector, and can contribute to the
loss of agricultural land. What can
be done to mitigate the negative
impacts of zoning on agriculture?
In Ohio, farmers and farmland owners
have the potential to influence
zoning laws and regulations through
open communication with local
government officials and participat-
ion in zoning boards and commis-
sions.

continued from page 4