



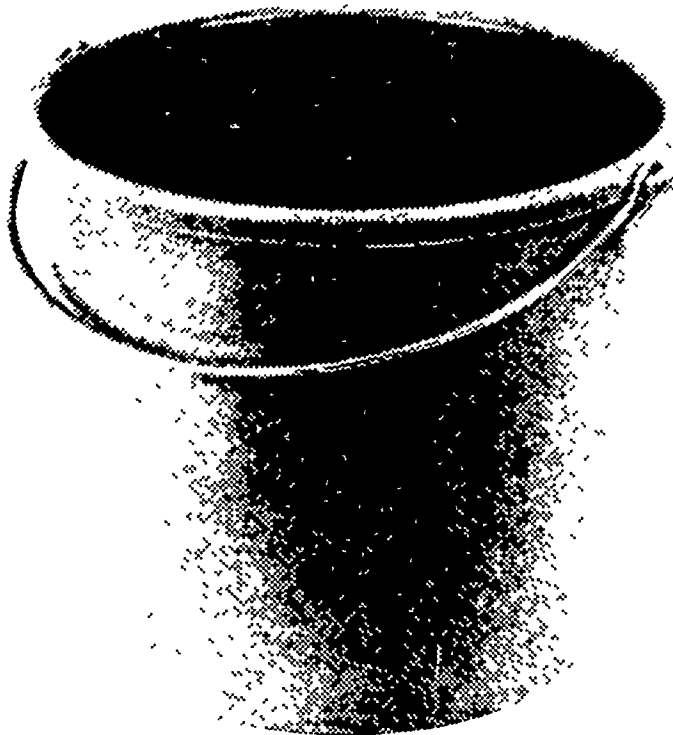
Jeff Hess, son of Elvin Hess Jr., Strasburg R1, showed the champion steer at the 4-H and FFA beef show at the West Lampeter Community Fair



John Strawbridge of Stewartstown showed a number of blue ribbon hogs at the York Fair

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Berks Ag Center acclaimed

By Frederick E. Bubb
Information officer, SCS,
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
Have you ever called a government office, found out you had the wrong agency, and then called three or four numbers before you got the right office? Or have you had to drive from town to town to visit U.S. Department of Agriculture offices? This used to be the case in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

Recognizing the need for improved service to the agricultural community, Berks County officials looked for an opportunity to improve government assistance. About this time USDA began a program of encouraging housing all its agencies in a single building, called an agricultural service center. This concept appealed to the Berks County commissioners and a decision was made to build the first agricultural service center in Pennsylvania.

Agricultural agencies now operate with facilities never dreamed possible. Several sizes of conference and meeting rooms are available, including an auditorium which seats several hundred people. Equipment rooms, ample storage space, abundant parking, and even a lunchroom are extra facilities in the building.

Showing great foresight, the Berks County commissioners added several other uses to the building. Civil defense and county communications are in the basement. The lunchroom is also in the basement and provides a dual role as food support for the civil defense operation. The building contains all county storage and shop facilities. Craig Williamson, of the Pennsylvania Civil Defense Council, termed the building outstanding, attractive, and at the same time, functional.

The Berks County center houses the Cooperative Extension Service, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, and Soil Conservation Service, USDA. Other agencies in the center include the county conservation district, which operates the reception and information center, and an

Intermediate Education Unit and County Weights and Measures Office.

County Commissioner Vernon K. Shaffer, who also serves on the conservation district board, states, "I am pleased and proud to have been part of the team that helped make this agricultural center a reality. In this day of hunger in the world, the farmers of Berks County need all the help they can get."

The public reaction to the center has been good. Before the center, USDA agencies were located in three towns. SCS District Conservationist J. Norris Judy reports that more farmers are coming to the agency offices now. Berks County farmer Mark Wolfskill echoed this feeling. According to Wolfskill, "Farmers can now visit all the agencies under one roof, saving them time and gasoline along with the convenient and free parking. I think farmers will now participate in more programs because of the accessibility of visiting all these agencies under one roof."

The Berks County center is one of five agricultural service centers in Pennsylvania. Others are in operation in Erie, Lancaster, Dauphin, and Washington Counties. All are enthusiastically supported by farmers and agency personnel.

Erie County dairy farmer Calvin Henry commented, "Service centers are a definite advantage to farmers who use the services of a number of agencies. The common phone number and joint meeting room are a big help to farmers."

Another Erie County farmer, Burdette Sedler, added: "It is much easier to get your questions answered promptly." He noted that the modern facilities also benefit the agency personnel.

O. Bard Judy, SCS district conservationist in Washington, Pennsylvania, spoke for all the SCS district conservationists in Pennsylvania who operate in service centers: "We are finding that cooperation between the agencies increases greatly—we are working together more now than ever before."