

*Doing it their own unique way:*

# Group of Amish families preserves farmland

**BY DICK ANGLESTEIN**  
**HONEY BROOK** — It could be described as one of the "most unique farmland preservation efforts" ever accomplished in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Consider these facts.  
 —It covers a sizable chunk of some 900 acres of farmland

—A multi-million-dollar project, it is being accomplished without one cent of public tax monies

—It involves not only the preservation of prime productive ground, but the reclamation of land allowed to go fallow.

—In addition to crops, brand new agricultural facilities have sprouted forth on the land

—And, the land will likely remain in farming indefinitely.

But to the people immediately involved, it likely more aptly represents an effort to preserve a way of life.

And, they are doing it their way.

These are but a few of the descriptive phrases that could be applied to the manner in which new Amish dairy farms are being established along Rt. 322 just east of Honey Brook in Chester County.

Some 900 acres of land were purchased this summer by a group of Amish families from the LeBoutillier estate.

Purchase price alone for the land was just shy of \$2.25 million.

Since then, a new type of subdivision has taken place — an agricultural subdivision. Instead of being parceled off into residential plots, the land is being subdivided into dairy farms.

Thus far, five large barns, complete with silos and other dairying facilities, and two residences have been constructed.

Three more barn complexes and additional residences are planned for next year.

Already, several of the barns, designed to accommodate approximately 40 cows, are housing milking herds.

Involved in the project are young Amish families just beginning to farm on their own. They have come together from diverse areas, such as Churchtown, east of Lancaster City and the Lititz area.

In addition to the construction of the brand new farm structures, other improvements are being made on the land.

Fence rows and meadow areas allowed to grow over are being cleared. Low swampy areas will be drained and tilled to be reclaimed for meadowland.

The land clearing and construction of new barns and homes provides an atmosphere almost akin to the farm pioneering that took place in the area centuries ago.

Even the timetable of construction priorities resembled that of early agricultural settlers.

Initial emphasis was placed on the construction of barns to protect and store harvested crops to permit the establishment of the milking herds.

Some of the Amish are living in temporary housing until more construction efforts can be transferred to additional new residences.

The land was owned for a number of years by the LeBoutillier family. At one time, there had been an effort to establish a self-sustaining baronial agricultural operation on the land.

Some of the land had been rented to area farmers for growing corn and soybeans, but quite a bit had been allowed to grow over.

About six years ago, an effort was made to convert the tract into a residential development, including single-family homes, condominiums and high-rise apartments.

The development plan was turned down by the Honey Brook Township Planning Commission and it then appeared that the fate of the prime farmland might be decided in court.

But beginning about two years ago, negotiations began among planning officials, a representative of the owners and members of the Amish community. These finally culminated in the purchase of the entire tract earlier this year by the group of Amish families. It is the largest land transaction in the history of Honey Brook Township.



**Brand new dairy farm**

This entirely new Amish dairy farm, constructed east of Honey Brook since this summer, is already

occupied by a family which formerly lived in the Lititz area of Lancaster County.

Coincidentally, but entirely a separate effort, the establishment of the new dairy farms comes at a time when farmland preservation is a very active project in the Upper Brandywine Region of Chester County, which covers five townships including Honey Brook Twp.

The Regional Planning Commission of the Upper Brandywine Watershed has just received a comprehensive, two-year background study report on farmland preservation.

"This is one of the most thorough background studies ever made concerning farmland preservation," explains William Ford, Honey Brook Twp representative on the commission.

"We wanted to know exactly what we had before we decide how to go about saving it," the retired dairy farmer added.

The 212-page study includes far-reaching data ranging from rainfall and soil type statistics to the age of farmers and the likelihood of farming being continued into the next generation.

and from development pressures to attitudes of various people toward farming.

Using the background study as their source material and guide, the commission is investigating a number of different techniques concerning preserving farmland.

These include  
 —Purchase of development rights

—Transfer of development rights

—Deed restrictions  
 —Agricultural zoning  
 —Pennsylvania Act 442  
 —Community land trust

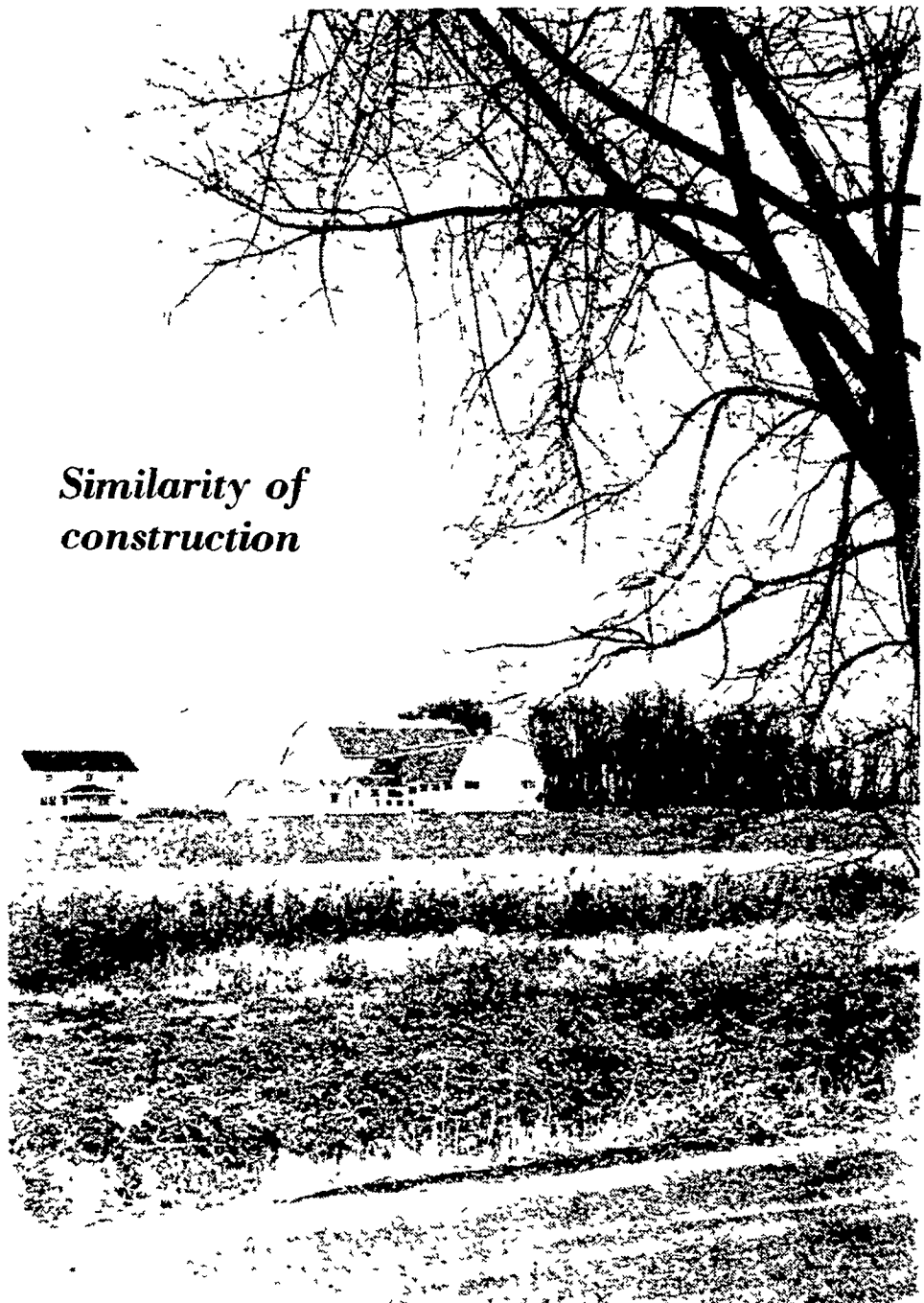
—And the recently approved Agricultural Development Council in Chester County

The background study, according to Ford, will

provide the data and facts necessary to back any effort at farmland preservation, once the decision is made on which technique to employ.

While the development of the Amish dairy farms is entirely separate from the regional farmland preservation study, it does add a very interesting and unique postscript to the massive report.

**Similarity of construction**



Another new dairy farm in the Honey Brook area of Chester County shows the similarity of construction of both the residences and barn complexes.

## Gook-a-mal-doh

**Plowing and clearing**



Plow stands amidst recently turned soil, while in background scrub timber and overgrown fence rows have been cleared to provide additional tillable ground.