

# At 72, Bob Lott still serves the soil

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**BENDERSVILLE** — Soil conservation has no better friend than Robert C. Lott, 72, owner and operator of Bear Mountain Orchards in Adams Co. States Lott, "I love the earth and I couldn't live in a community without being a part of it."

For over three decades Robert Lott has served the land and his community on conservation boards from the local district to a national directorship.

This year Lott will complete his second three-year term as a national director to the National Association of Conservation Districts. Lott is one of twenty-one national directors serving nationwide and represents the twelve-state Northeast region.

Lott's involvement with conservation originated out of necessity. Gazing toward the main highway he remembers, "I came up that road out there 46 years ago with \$18 dollars in my pocket and \$500 in debts. I saw this farm for sale and decided I wanted to grow fruit here."

"I was 26 years old at the time and must have been too dumb to know better. This place was considered to be one of the worst worn-out farms in the county. It had two and a half miles of fences that need to be cleared and gullies that were 150-foot wide. I don't think I

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Bear Mountain Orchards is hardly a worn-out farm today. Lott, his wife and his two sons and two daughters produce eight kinds of fruit on 400 acres and have an additional 400 acres of farmland and woodland.

Wrestling back the soil from nature included contouring 150 acres of the orchards, building nine ponds on the farm which are used for trickle irrigation, collecting runoff water and piping it into the ponds, and putting sod strips in all the acreage. Recalling the farm's original condition Lott chuckled, "I had to build up the ground in the front of the house 18 feet. The gullies around the house were so bad, we had water running throughout the house."

Lott considers himself a practical conservationist. He explained, "Thirty years ago if you said you were a conservationist, everyone looked at you a little funny. Then in the 1970s people went overboard and you were almost embarrassed to be called a conservationist."

Now we're swinging back to



Contours of fruit trees wrap around 150 acres of Bear Mountain's orchards to save the land from erosion. Lott remembers when the gullies in this plum orchard were so big that a tractor trailer could have driven into one.



Contour strips are still used on Bear Mountain Orchards steep hillside to control erosion. Diversion ditches also were added to the orchard — some of the longest ditches in the county.



Adams Co.'s Robert Lott, three decade conservationist, lives his testimonial that the water and land are the most important resource. Shown here with the trickle irrigation system in his orchards, Lott irrigates year round at ground level to conserve water.



Robert Lott's home was built in 1801 and has been completely restored since the days when gullies channelled runoff water through the main floor. Lott added eighteen feet of fill in front of the beautiful stone structure.

center, but it is the farmer who pays for those extremes. All the legislation that was passed during that time cost us money. The restrictions on spray materials is what the environmentalists wanted, but farmers pay the bills for it. Look at the gypsy moth situation now and how much that will cost us.

"Everyone wants to be involved in the conservation movement, but I'm not sure they're willing to pay the bill."

Some of the key concerns Lott

sees brewing are the problems created by absentee landlords, pointing out that no one wants to take responsibility for land that he doesn't own. He also predicted water will come a greater issue in the Northeast, taking its cues from the experiences of the West and Midwest.

Lott said his greatest concern is educating the public on the value of

land and water. Stated Lott, "The whole natural resource base — land and water — is what keeps us alive. Not one by itself, but the two together. We must do a better job of educating our younger generation that land and water are our two most valuable resources."

He continued, "Here in Adams

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Lott's land is so well terraced that even the roads are in steps. Here he points out one of the collection troughs he has in his orchard roads. These collect run off and prevent soil from eroding.