

Lehigh County completes farmland report

BETHLEHEM — An increase in the number of farmers who rent rather than own farms and a decrease in the number of young people entering farming are two serious problems for the future of farming in Lehigh County.

According to a report released by a Lehigh County Farmland Study Task Force, rental land and a loss of farmers are among the problems facing farmers in the county.

About one-third of Lehigh County's farmland (33,000 acres) is owned by nonfarmers and rented by farmers. Rental land, the study states, "is probably one of the major problems county farmers and planners face." Land that is rented rather than owned by farmers will remain in farming only as long as the landowner desires to keep it in agriculture. Its rental cost to active farmers depends both on the amount of land available and the level of income its owner needs to maintain the land as farmland.

In addition, because farmers

have no guarantee they will be able to rent the land in future years and because most nonfarmer landowners view their land in terms of rental income rather than agricultural productivity, the care of rental land is a problem, the study points out. Proper erosion control, crop rotation, maintenance of soil productivity and other needs often are not met.

One reason for the increase in rental land is the increased value of land that someday may be developed. Growth and development of farmland, and the possibility of further growth in the future have caused changes in land ownership patterns and changes in attitudes towards the land.

The study states that competition for farmland is great. Farmers find it difficult to compete with nonfarmers and buy land at prices inflated because of speculation.

The high cost of land is one reason that fewer young people are entering into farming. As the number of farms decreases, fewer

young people are trained in or interested in farming. And broadened job opportunities draw a number of potential young farmers to nonfarm jobs.

Lehigh County officials have expressed their concern for the loss of area farmland and farmers by issuing an eight-page report on the status of farmland in that county.

The report, a summary of a 121-page research report completed last year, discusses Lehigh County's current farmland situation — for example, how much farmland there is, where it is located and who farms it — and offers some suggestions for how farmland can be preserved. The summary presently is being mailed to approximately 2,500 county residents, including farmer and nonfarmer landowners, township officials and local planners.

Both the research report and the report summary were prepared for Lehigh County by the Lehigh Valley Conservancy, a nonprofit

conservation organization which serves eastern Pennsylvania. Kenneth A. Friedman, Ph.D., the Conservancy's executive director, was the principal researcher and writer for both reports. The research report was prepared in cooperation with a task force of Lehigh County farmers.

According to Friedman, the 121-page report established the baseline data that was needed to determine whether or not Lehigh County's farmland is disappearing. The report discussed the county's current farmland situation in detail. It included information about where farmland is located in the county, who owns the farmland and who farms it, how landowners feel about farmland retention and what steps can be taken towards preserving farmland.

"The next step," Friedman said, "is education, and for that reason

the County is issuing a summary of the research report. The public has to learn about the current situation and alternatives for the future before any steps can be taken to preserve farmland and farmers."

The summary discusses what steps can be taken towards farmland retention on both the county and township levels. It also includes a list of voluntary land preservation techniques available to individual landowners.

Additional copies of the farmland study summary are available. Anyone interested in receiving a copy of the summary can do so by sending 37¢ postage to the Lehigh Valley Conservancy, 1024 West Broad Street, Bethlehem, PA 18018. A limited number of the full 121-page study also are available from the Conservancy. For more information, call the Conservancy's main office at 215/866-3118.

Judge promotes product



This judge believes in promoting the ag product he's evaluating at Farm Show. Apple judge Melvin Kolbe, of the University of North Carolina not only is surrounded by apples, and has two handfuls, but also proudly displays them on his special tie.

Proper round bale storage reduces flies

UNIVERSITY PARK — Farmers who store large round bales of hay in a way that minimizes spoilage loss may also minimize the number of stable flies around their livestock.

In the summer, bloodsucking stable flies may reduce cattle's milk production and weight gain and also predispose the animals to infections.

Researchers of the Agriculture Research Service Biological Control of Insects Research Laboratory, Columbia, Mo., and the University of Missouri-Columbia found stable fly larvae or pupae in the undersurface of most bales stored outdoors in a survey of 12 sites in central Missouri. Exceptions were bales that were wrapped in plastic or stored on crushed rock, said ARS entomologist Gustave D. Thomas.

The survey was conducted to help the scientists develop pest management programs against flies affecting pastured cattle.

Bales in an advanced state of decay during the wet summer appeared less attractive to stable flies than actively fermenting bales that were only a few months old.

Aligning bales on a north-south axis to permit sunlight penetration under rounded edges, moving bales to well-drained sites and leaving a spacing between bales to promote drainage will help reduce spoilage and stable fly breeding sites.

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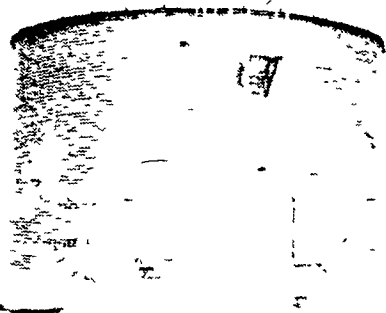
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