

Gregory plans to tackle conservation problems 'head-on'

BY DEBBIE KOONTZ

LITITZ — Last week, L.F. reported on the appointment of former Pennfield feed sales manager Robert E. Gregory to the position of administrator for the Lancaster County Soil Conservation District.

This week, we'd like you to meet the man behind the name.

Gregory, a robust man towering over six feet, resides in northern Lancaster County between the little towns of Brickerville and Lincoln.

Like his height, his goals while administrator of the district, surpass the norm. He discussed these goals and his personal feelings about conservation with L.F. on Tuesday morning — his second day of work.

"Did you ever think of looking at soil as an irreplaceable resource? If you look at it that way, that should make you as aware of it as you would be to an oil crisis or an energy crisis," he said.

But he's quick to give credit where credit is due, explaining that this philosophy was given to him by Dale Gerber, vo-ag instructor of Warwick High School. "He asked me that and I thought that just shed a new light on the subject," he said.

"I took this job with the idea that it's a real important job," Gregory said, explaining that he views the job as a combined one of public relations and education.

"The biggest thing is that we (the District) accomplish things that people can see. In some cases, you've got to sell people on the philosophy of conservation. It's controlling and preserving," he explained.

"One thing I had to learn is how

the entire Lancaster County Conservation District was set up," he said, eager to explain that it was created in the '30s to implement federal programs of the Soil Conservation Service as a result of the devastating dustbowl in the west.

But though the Conservation District is a new experience to him, agriculture is not. Gregory was selected out of 43 applicants for his widespread experience in agriculture according to Aaron Stauffer, president of the District Board of Directors.

The new administrator grew up on a 100-acre, 30-Guernsey dairy farm in Monroe County. Upon high school graduation, he entered Penn State to study ag education. After 7 1/2 years of teaching and serving in the veterinary core, he joined the Miller and Bushong Co. — which later became Pennfield — for a 25-year stint.

Today, Gregory lives with three of his four daughters in their R1 Lititz home. The Gregorlys also share their property with three dogs and three registered Quarter horses.

Through the years, Gregory said he has become an avid hunter and collector of antiques.

A widower for several years, Gregory attributes his collecting 'bug' to his deceased wife, Mary Alice. Among his antiques is a collection of Mary Alice Gregory glassware dating back to the 1800s, obviously saved because of the similarity in names.

Another hobby of Gregory's is a collection of hunting decoys. All shapes, sizes and colors line the walls of his home.

As an avid hunter, Gregory has had opportunity to practice his-



Robert E. Gregory, recently appointed to the position of administrator of the Lancaster County Soil Conservation District, discussed his goals for the job in an interview Tuesday — his second day of work.

sport in several areas of North America, shooting his proudest conquest in northern Quebec — a caribou.

Gregory serves on the Board of Trustees for the Ephrata Community Hospital and is second vice president of the Livestock and Allied Industries Board. He also is well-recognized for his dairy cattle and horse judging. He is a member of both the state and national Holstein Associations.

Anticipating his first day of work, Monday, Gregory said he put his boots in his car over the weekend. "I had a feeling I might need them on my first day. And would you believe at a quarter after six Monday morning, I had a telephone call from a man who said he saw my picture and read about me in Lancaster Farming and figured I would be the person to go to? Here I was, not even in the office. I didn't officially start work until 8 a.m. that morning. It made me feel good," he laughed. "I got a kick out of it." And, before Monday was over, Gregory had visited the troubled farmer.

Looking toward the future, Gregory says, "I guess one of the things we need to look at soon is our deteriorating water quality. More and more, high intensity animal agriculture, over fertilization and on-lot sewage systems create trouble."

While he pinpoints water quality as a major concern in the county, he said he feels soil erosion is of equal importance.

"The last USDA survey taken

before one completed in the late '70s was done in the '30s. The preliminary report showed that Lancaster County lost some 75 percent of their subsoil. This is a major concern," he said.

Pointing to last weekend's unusually high flooding, Gregory explained that most of the calls to the District on Monday centered around two kinds of concerns. "Some were concerned with what they lost in run-off and others were concerned about the run-off from their neighbor's fields.

"I think the figures state that it takes 100 years to make a tenth of an inch of topsoil, and we can lose 10 times that much with one good rain," he explained.

Gregory also hopes to correct a

few bad habits throughout the county, calling this endeavor his "pet peave project."

"I want to work with farmers who plow or till to the edge of the road. I just can't believe that the extra feet that they gain makes it all worthwhile. If measured in bushels, the production from that extra one row of corn probably would be less than 50 bushels to an acre. It would be better management if they left that roadbank green from the edge of the blacktop to the field. That will control run-off on fields and will save townships a heck of a lot of money in repairing or filling washout."

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Every room in the Gregory home is decorated with antiques.



An avid hunter, Gregory shot this caribou in northern Quebec.



Snow fluttered to the ground around Gregory and one of his three registered quarter horses. The Gregorlys also have three dogs.



With his hunting passion, Gregory joins the hobby of collecting decoys. These shelves are lined with decoy ducks, and the glasses, on top, are decorated with painted ducks. To the left is one of three "rewards" of his hunting trips that he had mounted and placed in his office.