

Ag Progress - a focus on better forage production

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Normally we like to look ahead to the future and that's the way it should be. But, in this report I'd like to look back a few years and talk about the early history of one of the finest agricultural shows in the East.

Ag Progress Days '84! It's hard to believe that this is the 16th annual three-day spectacular by that name. And certainly the theme of this year's big show "Agriculture Works For You" would have been just as appropriate for any of the previous shows.

What led up to that first Ag Progress Days held in 1969 at Fox Chase Farms near Towanda in Bradford County? It all goes back to our recognition of the importance of our forages and grasslands here in Pennsylvania. Let's take a brief look.

Modern grassland and field days in Pennsylvania, the forerunners of Ag Progress Days, got their start in 1951 with a series of five major events scattered around the state attracting some 30,000 people. These were repeated in 1952 on a larger scale—with more field demonstration of new forage crops and varieties and hay making equipment. And in 1952 Penn State's College of Agriculture hosted the 6th International Grassland Congress, with Penn State's ag farm at University Park, the site of one of those 1952 field days at that time.

Interest in improved forages continued. More smaller field days were held. Then in 1956 Frank Bamer, at that time Penn State's Agronomy Extension Section Chairman, and the late Al Cooper, Extension Agronomist, organized the district hay show program—as part of an intensified statewide educational program aimed at all phases of hay improvement, from establishment through utilization. I was fortunate enough to join the Penn State Agronomy Extension team in 1957.

By 1960 producers, educators and ag industry had gotten together to organize the Pennsylvania Grassland Council—the first of its kind in the U.S. Our district hay shows provided the basis for numerous Council



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sponsored smaller field days and other educational events during this period.

In 1962 the Pennsylvania and American Grassland Councils teamed up with Penn State to put on the First National Grassland Field Day at Hershey. Hay and silage shows along with a full field program and a lush of other educational activities were featured at this national extravaganza.

There were, of course, other big field events between 1962 and 1965. But in 1965 the Pennsylvania Grassland Council, in cooperation with Penn State and others, put on our first Pennsylvania Forage Progress Days—where else than at Hershey, Pennsylvania. This was followed in 1966 with a Forage Materials Handling Field Day at John Rodger's farm in Mifflin County. The year 1967 saw Forage Progress Days held at the Somerset State Hospital Farm, then back to Hershey in 1968 when the National Plowing Contest and Conservation Exposition was included as a part of this ever growing event.

By this time major forage field days with their associated competitive Hay and Silage Shows had become a tradition. And each year following that first successful Forage Progress Days in 1965 the event became bigger and better.

Finally in 1969, to emphasize the continued growth of the event and

to expand into broader activities including a major ladies program, the name was changed to "Ag Progress Days," the name it has gone by for the past 16 years.

The first Ag Progress Days was held at Fox Chase Farms near Towanda in Bradford County. During the following years this annual show was held at Windy Hill Farms near Titusville, Crawford County (1970); Rock Springs Agricultural Research Center, Centre County (1971); the Calvin Will and Richard Croner Farms, Berlin, Pennsylvania, Somerset County (1972); Hershey Farms (1973); Bloomsburg Fair Grounds, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, Columbia County (1974) and McDowell Farm near Mercer, Pennsylvania, Mercer County (1975). In 1976 Ag Progress Days returned to Rock Springs in Centre County at which has now become its permanent home.

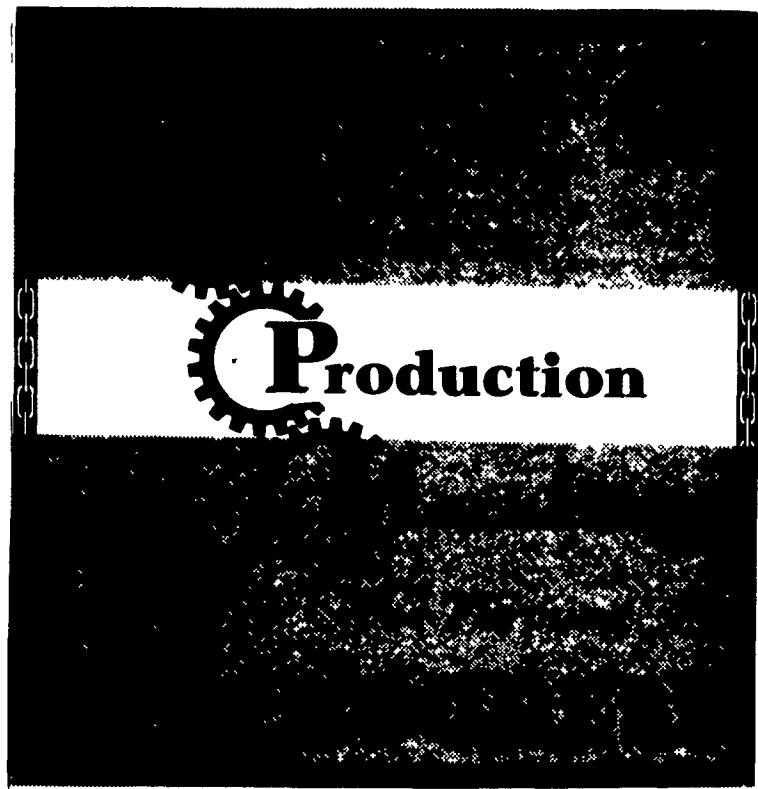
Industry interest and support, of course, grew with the show. In 1965 at our first Forage Progress Days some 45 commercial exhibitors, mainly seed, fertilizer and equipment, were on hand. This grew to 72 in 1969, our first Ag Progress Days, and this year (1984) nearly 300 commercial exhibitors will be on hand to showcase their products. And many of those original 45 from back in 1965 will be back again this year.

But Ag Progress Days and its predecessors were not and is not just a trade show. It had, and still has, as its main purpose—to bring the latest and most pertinent information to Pennsylvania farmers through demonstrations and comparisons.

One can't reflect back on Ag Progress Days without the names of just a few of the people who have made it possible. I've already mentioned Frank Banner and Al Cooper and their efforts in the early 50's. Certainly we owe C.M. Wolgemuth, former superintendent, Milton Hershey School Farms, and all of the Milton Hershey School staff a tremendous thanks for their help and support throughout the years. And let's not forget all of those county agents throughout the state who spearheaded a wide range of field day related programs. But without the efforts of the late Burt Horne, Penn State's Extension Ag Engineer, extraordinary, early forage field days may not have succeeded. And recent Ag Progress Days haven't been quite the same since his death in 1976. Incidentally, 1976's Ag Progress Days was dedicated to Burt, certainly a fitting tribute to his many contributions.

Well, lot of changes have occurred since those first grassland field days in the early 50's. We've seen many new and improved alfalfa, clover and grass varieties hit the market. Hay yields on many farms have soared as shown by the results of recent alfalfa growers programs in the state. Modern technology such as near infrared reflectance spectroscopy to measure forage quality is now on the scene. And bigger and better tractors and forage equipment are on display or at work in the field. None of these have completely solved the programs of bad weather and hay making time, but there are plenty of new ideas at work on silage and hay harvesting, preservation, packaging and storing to reduce the risk of weather related losses.

But some things haven't changed. You'll still be able to visit the hay show tent at Ag Progress Days '84, take in the big 1984 hay show, see quality hay at its best and chat with the judge and others in charge. And you'll still be able to get all kinds of new ideas on silage and hay making, soil conservation and a host of other farm and home

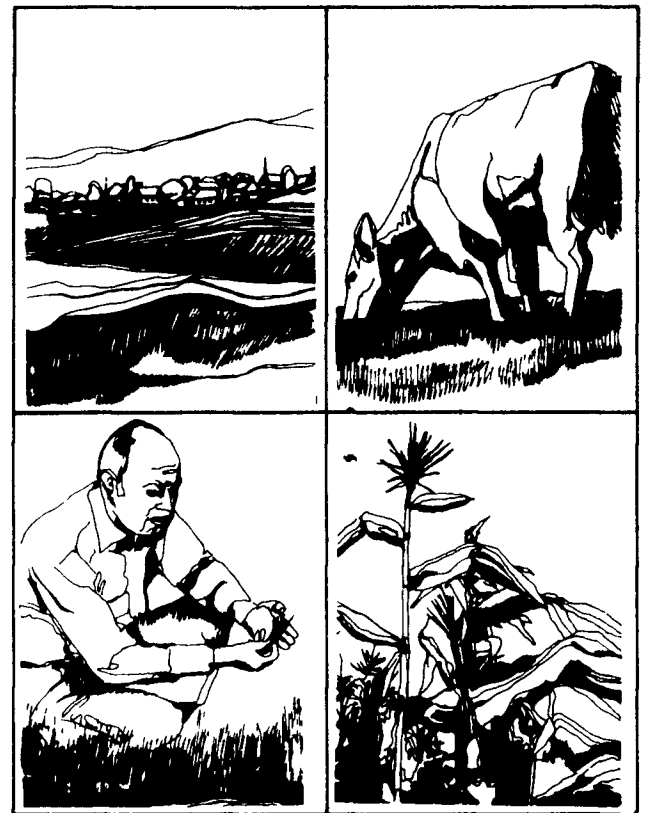


related subjects. So be sure you're on hand at this year's show to join the fun and activities.

Incidentally, if you reflect back on some of the dates I talked about in this brief history, you'll note that 1985 marks the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Pennsylvania Grassland Council. That's cause

for celebration and we're celebrating by teaming up with the American Forage and Grassland Council and Penn State to put on a National Forage Conference next March—at Hershey, where else.

You'll be hearing more about this later on. And we hope to see you there too.



AG PROGRESS DAYS '74

August 28-29
Bloomsburg Fairgrounds
Bloomsburg, Pa.

Sponsored by The Pennsylvania State University
Cooperative Extension Service
Assisting With Ag Progress Days '74:
Bloomsburg Fair Association
The Magee Carpet Co.
Columbia County Board of Commissioners
Pennsylvania Grassland Council
State Plowing Contest Committee
State and Federal Agricultural Agencies
Farm Machinery and Equipment Dealers



1972 AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS DAYS

August 30-31
Calvin Will and Richard Croner Farms
Berlin, Somerset County

Theme:
"Food Production in a Managed Environment"