

## Ag Progress Days make a good family mini-vacation

BY SUZANNE KEENE

MANHEIM — A mini-vacation is better than no vacation and often it's the only kind of break that busy farm families can find time to take. Ag Progress Days, a three-day event held annually at Rock Springs near the University Park Campus of Penn State University, offers the basic elements of such a mini-vacation.

While Ag Progress Days, like all good vacations, offers a change of scenery and lots of delicious food, the event goes one step further than simply providing a good time — it offers an opportunity to learn what's new in agriculture as well.

Donald Hershey, a Manheim area farmer who has been attending Ag Progress Days for a number of years, sees the event as a good way to check out the latest models of farm equipment while taking a break from endless farm chores.

"For the farmer, it's like a businessman's convention," Hershey says. It's a great way to see what's new; what's working and what isn't, he adds.

Usually at least one member of the Hershey family attends the event, and sometimes, the whole family goes. There are "a lot of things that everybody in the whole family can enjoy," he notes.

Hershey and his two sons agree that looking at the new equipment

is something they all enjoy.

Everyone in Pennsylvania who has an ag related product will be displaying it at Ag Progress, Hershey says. His wife, he continues, terms the event "bellyache day," because he and his two sons always come back bellyaching about all the new equipment they would like to have but can't afford.

Last year the Hersheys took special notice of the "Ag Bag," a new way of storing silage in plastic bags. While they did a lot of looking and talking about the new process, Hershey said, "We're not doing it ourselves." But, if they had been looking for a place to store extra silage, they might have done more than just look and talk, he continued.

Also of special interest last year were the computers, and once again, the Hersheys did a lot of looking and talking about them.

Hershey also enjoys looking at the test fields, where new strains of seed are tested. "I get as much enjoyment from looking at the field tests on corn and alfalfa as I do anything. I feel I can learn as much there as anywhere," Hershey says, adding that he bases his seed order for the coming year on what he sees at Ag Progress.

For Hershey's son, Larry, part of the fun of Ag Progress is the opportunity to visit with people he doesn't see too often. And, for his

sister, Patti, last year's Lancaster County alternate dairy princess, Ag Progress was an opportunity to meet new people as well.

For women whose patience wears thin when the men spend too much time inspecting the newest tractors, Ag Progress offers displays of the latest sewing machines. Ruby Bollinger, a Manheim area farm wife, said she saw the sewing machines at Ag Progress one year, and soon had one for herself.

Bollinger and her family attend the event every year. "I'm addicted to it," she says.

The family living tents are of special interest to this mother of three small children. "Since I've made it to those tents, I go back each year," she says.

Bollinger said she found a display of infant car seats particularly interesting. In another display, she said, she learned about herbs and how to use them for flavorings in place of salt. She also picked up some good recipes from the commodity booths and got to try some samples.

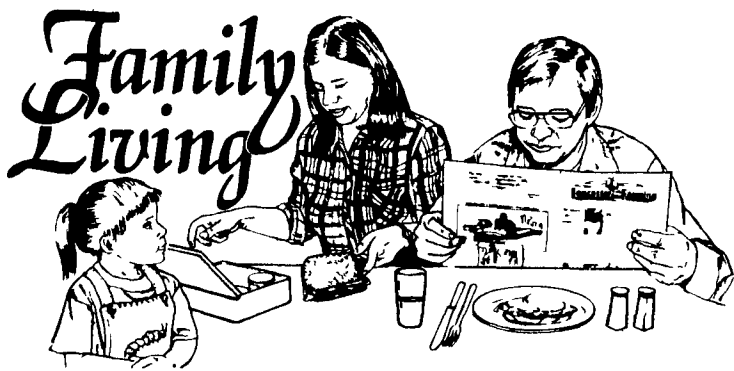
The Bollingers also credit Ag Progress with introducing them to their FM radios which enable them to have constant communication between their two farms. "They're an essential part of our operation," Ruby said, adding that she doesn't know how they ever got along without them.

The Bollingers take their children along to the event. "The older they get, the more they enjoy it," Ruby noted. She believes it is important to take the kids along to events like Ag Progress, so they become familiar with all aspects of agriculture from the very beginning.

Kids and adults alike have much to benefit from a day away from the farm when it's spent at Ag Progress.



Donald Hershey, center, and his two sons, Steve, left, and Larry, right, base their seed orders on knowledge they gain at Ag Progress Days. An excellent mini-vacation for busy farm families, this event offers plenty of educational opportunities.



## Divorced fathers play crucial role

NEWARK, Del. — Most of society's attention goes to a divorced mother, who usually assumes day-to-day responsibility for the care of her children. But the noncustodial father also plays a role in his children's lives, says University of Delaware extension family and child development specialist Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson. That role is far more important — and difficult — than most people realize.

After a divorce, most fathers miss their children as much as they miss him. Some fathers see their new role as a sham, with few functions or rewards.

They may try to escape the pain of separation by withdrawing from their former families, withholding support payments, and neglecting to call or visit. These hurt, angry fathers may feel it matters little how they treat their children. However, a father's continued interest and involvement makes a bigger difference to his children than he may realize, says Nelson. Children with supportive fathers have higher self-esteem and perform better in school than their less-fathered classmates.

A very young child needs a man's boisterous style of play as well as a woman's quieter style for maximum intellectual development. Furthermore, children who enjoy both parents' love and approval as they grow older will develop the self-assurance needed to establish loving adult relationships of their own.

How can a noncustodial father meet the emotional needs of a child he doesn't see every day? It takes work and practice, Nelson says, but it can be done. Some men

actually become better fathers after divorce because they have new opportunities to spend time alone with their children.

Fathers and children can maintain contact through letters, phone calls, and visits. With each contact, a father can let his children know he still cares about them, and the divorce was not their fault. Fathers who are involved in their children's lives after divorce stay happier and healthier, Nelson says, and their children do too.

Arriving on time for visits is one way to reinforce a child's trust. Generally, Nelson says, shorter, more frequent visits are preferable to fewer, longer ones.

Fathers often try to make up for the pain of a divorce by showering visiting children with gifts and special privileges. They don't want to mar their time together by refusing a child's demands.

But Nelson says it isn't necessary to treat children as visiting dignitaries. Though youngsters relish gifts and special privileges, they really want their father's undivided attention and the security of feeling welcome in his home. For example one child may be reassured from finding his toothbrush in the same spot whenever he visits his father.

Nelson says the most rewarding visits are planned jointly by father and child. Generally they include a comfortable mix of ordinary and special activities. Fathers needn't feel obligated to spend every waking hour rushing from the zoo to the amusement park to the movies. On the other hand, visitations are pointless if a father merely leaves his children to their own devices while he runs errands

and entertains other people.

Visitations accomplish their purpose if the children feel like members of a genuine father-child family. When there is more than one child, relationships are strengthened if the father can spend special time alone with each child.

Benefits can be lost, however, if parents use visitation as an arena to continue their own conflicts. One parent may purposely schedule visits at inconvenient times for the other, or deliberately change plans at the last moment. Another may try to undermine the authority of the former spouse during visits, or to pump the children for damaging information. This puts children in a very uncomfortable position. Wanting to please both parents they end up feeling guilty and disloyal. Children can recover more quickly from the aftershock of divorce if they aren't forced to side with one parent against the other. It helps if parents can maintain an air of civility, even if it isn't genuine.

Divorce marks the end of a marriage relationship, but not the end of the parents' relationship with their children. Even if a marriage ends in bitterness and anger, most children are willing to forgive and forget. They love irrationally, and their love persists even in difficult circumstances.

Often in divorce, time and distance conspire to keep fathers and their children apart. But no matter how many years pass, no matter how many mistakes a father feels he has made, Nelson says an occasional phone call, note, or birthday card will mean more to his child than he may ever realize.

## BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers

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### "FIRST DAYS"

We have finally gotten the summer heat, just in time to make the "Back to School" sales seem out of place. However, the heat does force many of us to retreat to air-conditioned facilities, including the malls, where pens, notebooks and lunch pails are best sellers.

For me, the first day of school was an exciting event. It took weeks to plan the right outfit. Then there was the choosing of new "school shoes." In my mind, new shoes gave me confidence to face a new school year. I also remember a certain apprehension: what will the new teacher be like, what kids will be in my class, will my teacher like me?

Many children do spend the last weeks of summer waiting eagerly, apprehensively and sometimes even fearfully for the start of school. As a parent, you can do a great deal to ease these tensions. Now, even though it feels most like summer, is the time to prepare your child and build a positive attitude toward school.

First, show an enthusiasm for school. Attitude plays an important part in the learning process. If you show enthusiasm for school, your child will be likely to look forward to it, also.

Recognize the first day as a big event. Some families emphasize the significance of the day by taking a picture of each child and then comparing them to other years. It helps to reinforce the good things about growing up and entering a new grade. If this is the first year of school for your child, be understanding about the

changes your child faces. Let your child express his feelings and acknowledge them as real feelings, some of which you might also have experienced. If your child has never experienced being away from home, you might plan a short visit away with friends or relatives yet this summer to build confidence in being away for school.

Talk with your children about going to school. Go over the schedule and route. One of my biggest fears was missing the school bus. We had a long walk out our farm lane to the bus stop. Talking about the time the bus was supposed to arrive helped to ease that tension.

Take some time to play "What if?" — What would you do if you forgot your lunch money?; What if you lost a library book?; What if you got sick during school?; What if you forgot your homework? Just knowing what some possible solutions are will help your child function with confidence rather than panic.

Decide now on a normal routine for after school hours. If you are working when your child returns home from school, set clear plans about your expectations. Don't forget to plan for time together when you share the happenings of the day with each other.

School is an important part of every child's life. Be sure to take the time now to help ease those first days ahead. By making this new step a pleasant experience, you are building a strong foothold for all the years to come. No one can do that better than you!