

Flying Farmers 'grounded' in Lancaster this week

BY JACK HUBLEY

LANCASTER — Though farmers, for the most part, are a pragmatic group noted for their down-to-earth nature, there's at least one bunch that freely admits to having a difficult time keeping their feet on the ground.

But this week more than 500 members of the International Flying Farmers were quite content to be grounded at the Americana Host Farm in Lancaster to celebrate the organization's 40th annual convention.

More than 200 planes from as far away as the west coast and Mexico descended on the Lancaster airport last weekend for a week of educational and social events hosted by the Pennsylvania chapter. A highlight of the week was a tour of Lancaster County farm country on Tuesday.

Claiming some 10,000 members in their 41 chapters across North America, the Flying Farmers are not professional pilots, but farmers who find that air travel permits more efficient use of their working and leisure time.

"If your time is valuable, you can do things in one day in an airplane that would take you two days in a car," says Marietta member Keith Vogt, adding that IFF's membership is made up of farmers "who happen to use an airplane like another person would use a pickup."

And trading in that pickup for an

aircraft need not be financially prohibitive, says Vogt, noting that one of the biggest misconceptions related to air travel is the notion that aircraft owners are rich. "For \$5,000 you can buy an airplane that will serve you well," asserts Vogt.

The convention's transportation chairman, Dave Huber, of Peach Bottom adds that buying an airplane can be a sound investment. "Anyone with a 15-year-old airplane that's well maintained can sell it for more than he paid for it," Huber says.

And with the cost of a combination chapter and international membership running "less than the cost of a tire on a car," Huber notes that joining IFF is a good investment, as well.

To qualify for regular membership, a farmer must derive at least 51 percent of his income from agriculture, and at least one member of the family must have a pilot's license. Associate members must also be licensed pilots, but do not have to be involved in agriculture.

The benefits of membership include a group aircraft insurance program, and participation in group tours throughout the country. IFF also maintains a legislative liaison in Washington.

But not all IFF's benefits are so easily defined, says Keith Vogt, who notes that IFF members always seem to be willing to open



Transportation chairman Dave Huber (left) of Peach Bottom welcomed Texas members to the International Flying Farmers convention in Lancaster this week. From left are Mr. and Mrs. Milton Grigsby Jr., and their daughter Darla Chappell of Floydada, Tex.

their homes to fellow members from anywhere in North America. "It's a camaraderie that rivals anything I've ever seen," says Vogt.



Parking spaces were at a premium at Lancaster airport this week, as more than 500 IFF members arrived for their convention.



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