

PA's Last Acre Mapped



Bedford County Soil Scientist Rob Knight labels Pennsylvania's "last acre" of mapped soil as Philo.

SCHELLSBURG — Soil Scientist Rob Knight stepped into the shallow pit, brushed his hand across its surface, gathered some pebbles from the bottom, and explained to some 50 dignitaries surrounding the site: "It's a flood plain soil with mottled color; there's a gravelly layer, very porous to water...It's an excellent agricultural soil, good for your corn." With that he picked up a large map and penned the classification of Pennsylvania's "last acre" as Philo soil.

After 44 years, all 28,881,800 acres in Pennsylvania have been classified and mapped. The "last acre" ceremony, observed by federal, state and local officials, was staged at Camp Living Waters near here October 23.

Although the State's soil classification and mapping project began in 1943, the effort was pursued with determination here in Bedford County only in the last seven years, according to County Soil Conservation (SCS) Director Terry Miller. Initial soil identification efforts in the Commonwealth date to 1900 in Lancaster County.

Pennsylvania is the only state of its size to have completed mapping.

While the State's soil mapping is finished, the soil survey isn't, pointed out Richard Arnold, director of the Soil Survey Program, SCS, Washington, D.C., as he addressed the gathering. The survey is a publication containing soil maps with accompanying manuscript descriptions.

Added Fred King, deputy secretary with the State Department of Agriculture, "Now we have the basic natural resource data necessary to help in municipal planning, in farming decisions, in government decisions." The mapping and subsequent surveys will help "so we can make wise decisions for land use," he said.

Gerald Lipscomb, SCS state soil scientist, noted that soils information on every acre of land in the Commonwealth is now available. Published surveys will be available for all Pennsylvania counties by late 1991, he added.

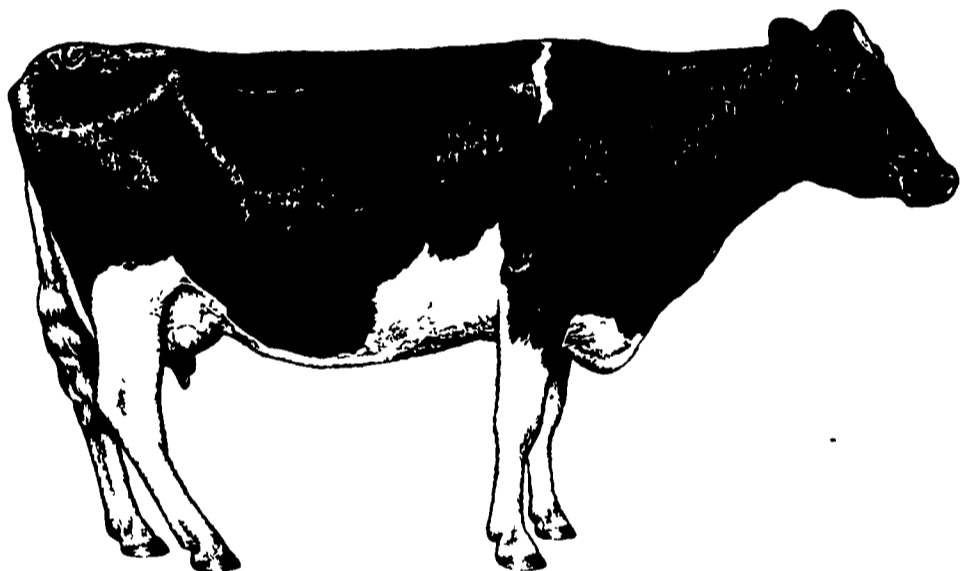
Arnold likened soil mapping to the building of a structure, which begins with a foundation, stone by stone. Mapping is the foundation

on which additional land use decisions can be made. "We have humanized our landscape," Arnold pointed out. "It is more beautiful than when it was all natural. We need to take care of our soil resources so that we continue to have one of the most beautiful humanized landscapes in the world."

From the foundation of mapping and published surveys, the next step, according to Lipscomb, is to digitalize the information so that it will be available via computer. Also, surveys published earlier now will be updated.

Cooperating in the state's soil classification effort, in addition to the soil scientists who walked the land and augered its actual acres, were SCS officials in Harrisburg and Washington as well as scientists at Penn State University and officials with the Commonwealth's Departments of Agriculture and Environmental Resources.

Rob Knight served as party leader of the team completing Bedford County's classification and mapping.



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