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Zimbabwe Farmers Visit Lancaster County

BY LISA RISSER

LITITZ (Lancaster) — When you come right down to it, we live in a small world: our hopes, dreams, and problems are echoed by people in countries all over. For instance, two Zimbabwean couples saw this week that the economic situation of Pennsylvania farmers is similar to their own.

"There's an economic squeeze in agriculture that's world wide, really," said Oliver Newton, a commercial farmer from eastern Zimbabwe. "We (as farmers) have rising costs and static returns on the products we offer."

Newton and his fellow travelers, which included his wife, Sarah, and Hammy and Mary Ann Hamilton, noticed that some of the farm families they met in the United States are looking for enterprises outside of farming to support themselves.

The Newtons and Hamiltons were in Pennsylvania for about two weeks, staying with farm families in Washington, Huntingdon, and Lancaster counties as part of a new exchange program coordinated by Penn State and the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) in Zimbabwe. While in Lancaster, the Hamiltons stayed with Elvin and Marian Brenneman of Mount Joy and the Newtons were hosted by Robert and Naomi Spahr of Lititz.

The strongest memories the travelers will take home are of Pennsylvania's trees and rolling countryside, according to Oliver. "Every farm looks beautiful; they aren't dirty," he said.

"The family unit has really

struck us," added Hammy Hamilton, the recently retired provincial chairman for CFU's Manicaland Province. He especially was interested in the 4-H and FFA programs and the concept of giving children farming responsibilities, such as raising a hog or sheep, at an early age.

The primary purpose of the exchange program, in which Pennsylvania farmers will go to Zimbabwe, is to encourage discussions between people in different countries on the issues facing agriculture in the future. The program also serves to promote goodwill between countries and extend knowledge of various cultures.

"I think the concept of Africa in America and America in Africa is completely misrepresented in each country," commented Oliver. "We think of Americans as 'Dallas', 'Dynasty', cowboys, and prairies. Americans tended to think of us as..."

"Swinging from the trees," interjected Sarah with a grin. She added that many people in our country think that Zimbabwe has South American-style jungles and big game animals roaming their lands.

Restricted, or limited, news reporting in both countries probably contributes to the misconceptions, according to Mary Ann. They see broadcasts of our racial skirmishes, while Americans see tapes on the political unrest in Zimbabwe. "We don't see the positiveness of Americans," she commented. "People are very positive in the United States; they're looking forward."



Part of an international exchange to promote good will and the discussion of world farming issues, two Zimbabwean farming couples visited Pennsylvania recently. From left, Marian Brenneman of Mount Joy; Mary Ann Hamilton; Hammy Hamilton; Oliver Newton; Sarah Newton; and Naomi Spahr of Lititz.

Oliver reasoned that the positiveness that they have witnessed may be due to the age of our country, a concept to which Americans may not be accustomed. "You have had a long history in Pennsylvania," he explained. "We have a long history to live through: we are a new nation."

Hammy and Mary Ann own 1,500 acres on which they grow tobacco, corn, peanuts, and a vegetable called blue-tick bean. During the 3½ years Hammy served the CFU, Mary Ann managed the farm, a responsibility she is glad to

hand back. The couple have entered the beef cattle business recently with 200 head of Angus-Sussex crossbreds. Hammy hopes to introduce some Brahmin blood eventually. Mary Ann runs a trading store on the farm that provides basic necessities to the farm's hired hands.

Oliver and Sarah have a bigger operation that includes growing 1,300 to 1,500 acres of cotton, 400 acres of seed corn, 400 to 600 acres of soybean, as well as many acres of winter wheat and seed beans. In addition, they have about 400 head of beef cattle, a Charolais-

Africana crossbreed with some Brahmin blood, and Dorper sheep, which are similar to a Suffolk. Sarah does the farm's recordkeeping, tends a flock of 100 layers and numerous broilers, and manages the farm's trading store, which provides goods to the laborers, a number that reaches 1,000 during cotton harvesting.

The two couples began their visit to Pennsylvania in Washington County, followed by two days at Ag Progress, and a stay in Huntingdon County. On Thursday they departed for Washington, D.C. for their return to Zimbabwe.