

Elizabethtown Agriculture Project Bolsters Life Skills

ANDY ANDREWS
Lancaster Farming Staff
ELIZABETHTOWN (Lancaster Co.) — In science fiction stories, it's called "terraforming" — the process of adopting a hostile environment to one suitable for humans.

Much the same can be said for the work of the entire agriculture department at Elizabethtown, who have spent the last half year creating a thriving wildlife habitat and profitable operation from a farm that was, at one time, barely profitable.

Work began last summer to renovate sections of the 30-acre Bear Creek Farm, once owned by Dave Sweigart and sold to the Elizabethtown Area School District, into an educational facility.

A dedication ceremony, honoring the nearly 300 students, faculty, administration, staff, and volunteers, will take place on Wednesday, June 3, at 5 p.m. The event will include a chicken and fish barbecue as well as fresh salad prepared from vegetables grown in the students' greenhouse.

Educational laboratory
 "The facility will serve as an educational laboratory for not only the agricultural department, but for the entire school and community," said Heather Henisee, president of the FFA chapter.

Also, the work on the facility has more far-reaching goals. The project, part of the Building Our American Community (BOAC) activities at the school, rivals the BOAC Award-winning project undertaken at the school in 1983 — the construction of the Elizabethtown Fairground.

"We feel this might be a project that would be worth a good run at the nationals," said William Erikson, agriscience teacher at the school and FFA adviser.

Much of the school, including 14 ag science classes, has been involved in the Bear Creek project, including FFA, agriscience classes, electrical class, wildlife, welding classes, and others. Erikson said that he wants every part of the school to be involved because it represents "more people involved and more agencies involved than



Construction continues on a water diversion area around the Bear Creek Farm pond. The department plans to stock the diversion with various plants to help speed up the wetlands conversion process, according to agriscience instructor Al Martin, left. At right is Gary L. Swihart, fishery assistance project leader with the wildlife service.



Dave Winters plants string beans on the freshman plot at Bear Creek Farm.



Last week, Gary Swihart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, seated, visited the Bear Creek Farm to work out the details of stocking the pond as part of the service's Partners in Wildlife program. At right is Al Martin, agriscience instructor at Elizabethtown.

the fairgrounds project." Erikson said the department has been working with "at least a dozen agencies" in renovating the farm.

Ag activities

Various agricultural activities comprise the project, including:

- A one-acre pond that has been expanded and includes a dock. The pond will be stocked, with the help of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with minnows, crayfish, bullfrog tadpoles, water plants, channel catfish, bluegills, and striped bass. The 10 acres of wetlands will

provide a hands-on laboratory for the school.

- 45 freshman agriscience students worked more than a half-acre of ground and planted a variety of vegetables. The students had to sign a contract to sell the vegetables with family and friends.

- The ag structures class, under the guidance of instructor Gary Gattens, involved various classes in the construction of a tool shed to store farm material at the site.

- School welding classes constructed a pumphouse at the pond to provide underground irrigation capability to the farm's 1-acre orchard.

- About 25 dwarf applies, 10 cherry, and numerous raspberry and Christmas trees were planted

last year.

At the pond site, water testing is conducted continuously. Soon, the department will begin stocking the pond with various types of fish and other wildlife.

Construction continues on a water diversion area around the pond. The department plans to stock the diversion with various plants to help speed up the wetlands conversion process, according to agriscience instructor Al Martin.

Gattens' ag structures class contributed by building the shed, but he said that the students will continue to develop the area. "We're helping to improve the area by putting it back the way it was," said

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A one-acre pond at the Bear Creek Farm has been expanded and includes a dock. The pond will be stocked, with the help of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with minnows, crayfish, bullfrog tadpoles, water plants, channel catfish, bluegills, and striped bass. Here, Gary Swihart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, left and Al Martin, Elizabethtown agriscience teacher, discuss plans for stocking the pond.



Matt Maines inserts watermelon seeds into the mounds built up on the half-acre plot at the Elizabethtown Bear Creek Farm.