

Farmer Loves Land Enough To Give It Away

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HAMBURG (Berks Co.) — A soul-deep love of farmland has motivated a Berks County farmowner to donate development rights valued at more than \$77,000 to the Berks County Conservancy.

According to Harold Stoudt, 63, of Hamburg, perserving his 67-acre beef and crop operation by donating its development rights to the conservancy is a solution to his quest to protect something that he has seen destroyed all his life.

"This is something I have philosophically believed in for a number of years (preserving farmland). There's plenty of land to be developed. There's no reason to put it on farmland."

For 25-years, Stoudt's main occupation had been working for road construction contractors. He helped put in some of the major highways and intersections in several counties in the south central and south eastern part of the state.

Emotionally trapped between needing to work to provide and hating to destroy something he holds so dear, he said he laments the political and greed-driven development decisions which have largely ignored the greater value to humanity of preserving one-of-a-kind soils.

The clover-leaf at Park City shopping mall in Lancaster County is a place Stoudt where said he worked and he regrets the work done.

According to Stoudt, 16 inches of fertile top soil was removed in order to put in the traffic structure.

"If they would have moved it to a ridge close by they could have saved a lot of valuable farmland. Now what can grow there?"

The farm he owns is modest and because of the soils, would not qualify for the state's PACE program, which puts priority on going after the best available farmland currently in production.

After hearing about American Farmland Trust's work in Lancaster County, he contacted the organization and was directed to the Berks County Conservancy.

The main purpose of the conservancy is to preserve open areas for maintaining quality of life.

To achieve this end they have created several programs which aren't necessarily focused on the same goal, but which result in the same outcome.

Its ability to act as a recipient for donated development rights is a

recent development. This is the first year of the program and Stoudt the first to apply.

The benefits of donating his land are financially not as encouraging as what might appeal to those seeking or needing cash as an incentive, he said.

However, the Berks County program does qualify the landowner for income tax deductions under U.S. Internal Revenue Service regulations. He will also automatically qualify for the "Clean and Green" local tax breaks for agricultural land.

(Landowners should know that because some properties in the state have not been reassessed for property tax value, a number of landowners are paying much less than they would under such a Clean and Green formula applied to current land values.)

Under the IRS-allowed program, Stoudt can deduct 30 percent of his adjusted gross income for federal taxes for a six years or until the tax deductions equal the value of the donated development easements, whichever comes first.

The state does not offer any kind of tax-reduction incentive, but instead operates by paying a share of the price for development rights.

Stoudt said that in his case, six years of 30 percent reductions in paying federal income tax will never equal the value of the development rights he donated.

The return to Stoudt, in the form of tax deferrals, is relatively small, but Stoudt, who has retirement benefits from off-farm work and still works the farm, said his main concern in making the donation was to find a way in which he could secure the use of the farmland for future generations.

"At most, I might recover \$9,000. That's very preliminary. It may be less. But the objective was not for money, it was something I wanted to do," he said.

"The Good Lord created only so much farmland and we can't create any more. That's just the way it is," Stoudt said.

Stoudt also helped put in 178, which had been a heavily traveled transportation route before more recently constructed major roadways were installed.

"Why did they have to put it on farmland?" Stoudt asked rhetorically. "Why not a few miles north at the foothills of the mountains. We need better planning," he said.

Stoudt moved to the farm in 1967 and has always run the farm



From the left, Fred Levering, president of the Berks County Conservancy and farm owners Kathryn and Harold Stoudt, stand on the first farm to be preserved in Berks County under an alternative to the state's PACE program.

as a parttime business, raising his three children in the northern Berks County rural area.

The farm, though small, is used for raising hay, corn and pasture for a cow-calf beef operation. But there are trees and plants on the property that were planted long ago that make the land even more special every year.

Stoudt said his wife, Kathryn, had gotten upset with him already because he would come home late from work and immediately check on trees that he had planted, or graftings that he attempted.

"I would have done this even if there was no recovery from income tax (deductions). This is what I wanted to do."

When Stoudt called the American Farmland Trust, he talked to Ann Orth, a Pennsylvania field representative. She put him in contact with Phoebe Hopkins and John Symonds, former conservancy executive director (who is now with the Lancaster County conservancy as executive director and agricultural land preservation specialist).

Orth now works for the Berks Conservancy, replacing Symonds. The Stoudt farm is one of many she said she would like to see be preserved.

The conservancy has funds available to assist farmers and landowners through the agricultural conservation easement donation

process, according to Orth.

The appraisal required by the IRS to demonstrated the before and after land value of the farm was paid for by the conservancy, and it was his choice of appraiser.

"The Berks County Conservancy would like to see other farmers in the county follow Stoudt's lead in preserving land through easement donations," Orth said. Stoudt agreed.

She said that with limited funds and strong competition among the county farms already competing for the county-state program, many smaller farms are being overlooked, and other farms which may have low-ranking soils or are too close to boroughs and public infra-

structure are also difficult if not impossible for consideration through the state program. The conservancy offers an alternative.

The conservancy program is overseen by a committee of 15, along with Hopkins and Orth. The mix of backgrounds, interests and education are considerable.

Those interested in examining that conservancy's plan can contact any of the committee members. They are Bill Angstadt, Roy Christman, Phillip Edwards, Carl Herbein, Bill Hughes, Warren Lamm, Jan McClellan-Renner, Ernest Miller, Clyde Myers (county extension agent), Richard Orwig, Bernie Riley, Tom Russ, David Thun, Carl Wiest, and Stam Zervanos.

Pa. In Stage II Of Pseudorabies Control Effort

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — State Agricultural Secretary Boyd E. Wolff announced Wednesday that Pennsylvania is now in Stage II of its Pseudorabies eradication effort.

The determination that Pennsylvania is in Stage II was made at a meeting of the National Pseudorabies Control Board in Louisville, Kentucky.

"This is another step along the way to eliminating pseudorabies in Pennsylvania," Wolff said. "I applaud the efforts of the Pennsylvania Pseudorabies Advisory Committee, which was of great assistance in our reaching Stage II."

Pseudorabies is a contagious disease affecting swine. Progress in the eradication of the disease is measured in five stages: Stage I (preparation), Stage II (control), Stage III (mandatory herd cleanup), Stage IV (surveillance), and Stage V (pseudorabies free).

As a part of Stage II control efforts, knowledge of infected swine or herds must be reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Pseudorabies tests are required for swine movement and sale.

Surveillance to detect pseudorabies is required at time of slaughter. All infected herds must be quarantined. Tracing of origin and disposition of animals is required.

The use of pseudorabies vac-

cines is also required, along with the sanitation of conveyances of pseudorabies-infected swine.

Stage II also requires the proper disposal of dead animals of pseudorabies infected herds.

There are 126 quarantined swine herds in Pennsylvania. Ongoing work is being done to detect and control infections in the 7700 swine operations in the state.

To coordinate control efforts, the Pseudorabies Advisory Committee was established. The committee is made up of pork producers, university scientific and technical advisors, and regulatory advisors from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture.

The pseudorabies eradication program is an initiative of the swine industry. The committee's goal is the eradication of pseudorabies in Pennsylvania by 2000.



A few beef cattle and fewer than 100 acres of tillable soil make this a modest farm, but the Stoudt farm is nevertheless preserved for agriculture.

