

# Marsteller Easement Largest In State

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, May 15, 1993-A31

(Continued from Page A1)

acres are Class I, II, and III soils, much of it some of York County's most productive ground; an estimated 145 acres are woodlands. Acreage is all contiguous.

"This was a joint family decision to do this; we've been renting these farms anyway," says John Marsteller, Sr., who with his wife, Mary, owns the 550-acre largest section of the 1063-acre sign-up. Another 340 acres is owned by Marsteller's sister, Ruth Trout. Additional acreage of Green Valley Farm, owned by John Jr. and his wife, Chris, and the farm of Mary Marsteller, mother of John Sr., are also included in the easement package. Easement purchase proceeds will be shared by the family owners, according to their portions of acreage in the total block.

Easement purchase is actually on 1020 acres, with the remaining 43 donated to the county. Those 43 additional acres were "extra" land found by surveyors fine-tuning deed boundaries on the various properties after the original application and acceptance process had gone through the county/state preservation program.

The Marstellers plan to reinvest their easement proceeds into purchasing more of the acres owned by John Sr.'s mother and sister - and to keep farming as they have for the past 33 years. Corn, soybeans, wheat and barley are planted in rotation, following conservation measures the Marstellers adopted many years ago. Until phased out last year, fattening cattle was also part of the family enterprises.

John Sr. and Mary purchased their 115-acre original farm a month before their marriage, in March 1960. Additional land acquisitions were made as neighboring land became available over the past three decades.

Like most "farm boys," John, Jr., "Johnny has been involved almost since he could walk and began helping with simple machinery operations at the tender age of seven.

"We had a neighbor who was down on the golf course near here one day who saw what he thought was a tractor without a driver go past on the road," laughs John, Sr. As this favorite family tale goes, the driverless equipment was actually being maneuvered by Johnny, who just wasn't very visible in the seat behind the big steering wheel.

After graduation from the vo-ag program of Kennard-Dale High School, John Jr. studied automotive mechanics. In addition to his work with the field crops, he is in charge of equipment maintenance. His son, Jeromey, has enjoyed spending time around the farm's shop since his early childhood years and already displays an affinity for farming.

This several-generation interest in large part prompted the Marstellers to pursue enrolling their acreage in the easement-purchase program. John Sr. became interested after attending a meeting several years ago which explained the program's plans and goals.

"This is a very solid farm, soil-wise, a very productive farm with a history of crop yields exceeding the county averages," notes Patricia McCandless, program coordinator for the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Program. "Their soil conservation practices have been exemplary. A priority of our program is toward preservation of farms that have and implement soil conservation plans at 75% or better."

According to McCandless, York County to date has 3870 acres enrolled in the agland preservation program, primarily in the southern portion with the recent inclusion of a Dover-area farm, nine townships now have farmland set aside for perpetuity. The Marsteller farm spans four of those townships, Hopewell, North Hopewell, East Hopewell and Fawn Township.

"By the end of summer, we expect to have a little over 4500 acres enrolled in York County," she adds. Some 1800 acres on eight farms have been selected for further consideration and apprai-

sal in the current annual selection cycle, to which landowners could apply in January.

Since institution of the program in August 1990, McCandless expects the county and state combined monies invested in purchase of York County farmland to total more than \$2.6 million by the end of the 1993 cycle.

Pennsylvania now ranks second in the nation for acres enrolled in conservation easement purchase programs, some 32,000 acres on 264 farms. Maryland is first in acreage enrollment with more than 98,000 acres set aside for permanent agriculture use.

"Ag friendly communities" are a key factor in selecting farms to be considered in the York County ag land preservation effort, notes coordinator McCandless.

"We are really trying to prioritize preservation efforts in townships where they have agriculture zoning, ag security areas," she relates. "It is so important to keep this effort going; we like to see townships that are committed to ag preservation."

In addition to soil capabilities and township commitment to ag land preservation, farms applying for easement purchase consideration are also scored on their proximity to other land already in the program, parcel size, economic viability, proximity to sewer and water, road frontage.

Through constant fine tuning of the selection processes, more emphasis is also being placed on farms owned and operated by families, rather than on rented acreage.

"There seems to be a bigger

commitment to soil conservation on land that is family owned and operated," McCandless says of that emphasis in the selection process.

The Marstellers recently visited a daughter and son-in-law in Colorado, stopping along the way to chat with farmers in Kansas and Nebraska.

"We hear the same thing there - no young farmers going into the business because it's too costly and there's not enough return. And their land in the Mid-West is a lot cheaper than it is around here," Marsteller laments.

"And when land is appraised at farm owner's death, it should not be appraised at the potential sales value, but at the farmland value. By selling the easements, children inheriting farmland won't have as big a tax bite to face," he adds.

In addition to son John Jr., the Marstellers also have three daughters. Susan lives in York and works in the fashion-design industry. Martha, recently married, makes her home in Minnesota.

Helen, her husband Donald Rineholt and their two sons live nearby. Donald lends a hand with field work as needed. Grandsons Jason, 11, and Matthew, 9, Rineholt keep in close touch with the farm activities and think they might want to farm because "it's fun."

If, at some time in the future, Jason, Matthew, Jeromey or perhaps his sister Heather, 7, do choose to become farmers, they will have assurance that the land their family has farmed will not be converted to townhouses, shopping malls or parking lots but will remain in agriculture forever.

## Farm Calendar

(Continued from Page A10)

Wednesday, June 9

Catawissa Valley Fair, Catawissa, thru June 12.

Thursday, June 10

Ag Issues Forum, Leola Family Restaurant, 7:30 a.m.-9 a.m.

Friday, June 11

Delmarva Children Festival, Cambridge, Md., thru June 12.

National Guernsey Convention,

Best Western Dubuque Inn, Dubuque, Iowa, thru June 14.

Saturday, June 12

Sunday, June 13

88th American Dairy Science Association, University of Maryland, College Park, thru June 16.

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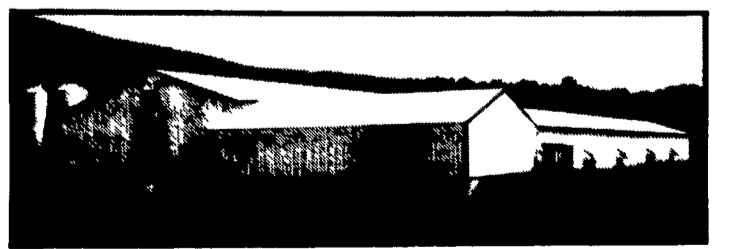
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