

# Farming Celebrated In Chester County

UPPER OXFORD TOWNSHIP (Chester Co.) — Chester County's new public-private farmland preservation partnership brought its message of support directly to the farmers on Sunday, July 18, at Upper Oxford Township's community park. Hosting a picnic barbecue in honor of the county's 57 registered Century Farmers, representatives from the Agricultural Development Council, the Agricultural Land Preservation Board, the Brandywine Conservancy and Penn State's Cooperative Extension let the western Chester County farmers know that they intend to use their combined knowledge and energy in helping to provide another hundred years and more of active, productive farming in the county.

This was a day to "celebrate farming." In a society where some families move every three or four years, there is an incredible sense of continuity and stability in recognizing the presence of the same family on the same land for over a hundred years. Eighteen Century Farm families attended the barbecue and were easily identified by the blue and gold ribbons attached to their nametags. They included the H. Wheeler Amans who are nearly two-cen-

tury farmers (1794-Kimberton); Mrs. Eusebius Baily and her son's family (West Chester); David Clevenstone (Phoenixville); three generations of Alfred Dallett's family (Cheyney); Donald and Shirley Elliott, a two-century farming family (1769); and their neighbors, Vernon and LaRue Guest (Pottstown); the William Handys (1743-Coatesville); John Kirk (Nottingham); Lukens Hutchison (West Grove); veterinarian Carol Landefeld and her husband Robert Witt (Kennett Square); the David Lights (Cochranville); 4 generations of a two-century farm, Rebecca Krueger, the Frederick McMichaels and their son's family (1777-Honeybrook); another two-century family, Landis and Barbara Reid (1793-Parkesburg); Mrs. Sylvester Scott and Benton and Mary Woodward (Coatesville); and Mrs. Helen Young and her family (Coatesville).

A shady grove and a picnic pavilion draped in red, white and blue bunting set the stage for displays that illustrated progress in farmland preservation and the types of advice and support the

partners can offer the farming community. Take-home packets of information were available, and staff members spent the afternoon getting to know the farmers. A chance to sign up for information from Chester County's Task Force on Tax Reform resulted in a basket full of requests. The Conservancy gave away posters of James Wyeth's painting "Hay Bales," and country music was supplied by Chris Ferrier and his Cacklin' Hens & Roosters Too.

The newly signed cooperative agreement was good cause for celebration. The innovative partnership prepares the way to combine the county's ability to purchase development rights from farmers with the Brandywine Conservancy's expertise in helping landowners plan for the future of their property and the Cooperative Extension's work with financial planning. As Ray Pickering, director of the Agricultural Land Preservation Board, stressed, "Rather than competing for the scarce hours in a farmer's day, the partnership will work together in bringing information to the farmers."

The other hosts included Joyce Hershey for the ADC, Colin Johnstone who spoke for both the ALPB and the absent chairman of the County Commissioners, Karen Martynick, who was in Chicago accepting an award for Chester County's farmland preservation program, Bill Sellers of the Brandywine Conservancy whose recent environmental trip to Hungary dramatically increased his appreciation of the productivity of Chester County's soils, rainfall and farmers, and Laurie Sickow-Sandow from the Penn State Cooperative Extension.

Farmers have serious personal concerns about estate planning and inheritance taxes which they can plan for to some degree. However, there are also many challenges that are totally beyond their control. For instance, development pressures in other sections of the county have a domino effect on this area of seemingly endless corn and grain fields. As people flee higher cost housing and taxes in central and northern Chester County, their arrival in the western townships and school districts places a greater financial burden on the farmers. One farmer at the picnic thought he had his 1993 school tax payment pretty well taken care of - until the bill arriv-

ed. His land straddles 2 school districts; the bill is \$4,000 higher than last year. According to Century Farmers David and Annabelle Light, they were recently faced with the choice of selling 64 acres of their farm or going broke.

The Century Farm picnic's special guests were enthusiastic in their support for the new effort. They included home district State Representative Arthur Hershey, a farmer himself, who is working hard to establish a new 4-H center in the county; Congressman Robert Walker who is working toward relief from inheritance taxes for farm families that keep on farming; State Senator Earl Baker, just home from a trip to China and renewed awareness of both our democratic traditions and rich agricultural resources; County Commissioners Joe Kenna and Andy Dinniman; former State Representative Sam Morris who still speaks for the farmer as a member of the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board; Chester County Historical Society's Bob Thompson; Leroy Bruce, Farm Manager for the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center and also Barclay Hoopes, president of the Chester-Delaware Farm Association.

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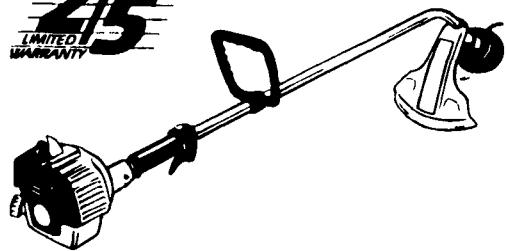
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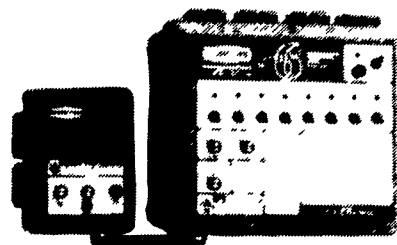
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