

Laurel Ridge Project At Ag Progress

ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.)— Pennsylvania's Laurel Ridge attracts residents of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Baltimore and Washington who enjoy the area's hunting, fishing, hiking skiing and boating activities. The ridge also provides potable water to a large section of southwestern Pennsylvania.

Visitors to Penn State's Ag Progress Days, August 17-19, can learn more about efforts to preserve the Laurel Ridge environment. A display in the College of Agricultural Sciences Exhibits Building will explore how scientists are helping local officials gather the information needed for sound resource management decisions.

The Laurel Ridge divides Fayette and Westmoreland counties from their eastern neighbors, Somerset and Cambria counties. Nearly half of the 330 square mile area is publicly owned, and it con-

tains six state parks as well as the Seven Springs and Hidden Valley ski resorts.

Residents of the area, concerned about the effects of real estate development on the region's natural resources, are seeking ways to better assess the potential impacts of new construction and other activities.

Researchers in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences are developing a computerized geographic database that will enable users to quickly access and analyze information about the region's soils, water, land use and other factors.

"A computerized Geographic Information System gives people an easier way to examine and comprehend the many interrelated factors affecting natural resource management," said Dr. Rick Day, director of Penn State's Land Analysis Lab. "Layers of geographically referenced maps with

related statistics and attributes are stacked in a computer's memory to perform complex assessments of a region's natural resources.

"Maps displaying different information — for example, watersheds, wells, water and sewer lines, soils and topology — can be superimposed on the GIS's computer screen to create images that show combinations of factors."

At the College Exhibits Building, visitors can see how a GIS works. A computer demonstration will show visitors how easily the system can mix and match different types of information, while educational exhibits will detail the scope and goals of the Laurel Ridge GIS project.

The Laurel Ridge GIS will include data layers detailing features such as the region's soils, topography, geology, land use, water, oil and gas wells, timber and coal

resources and water quality research data. "Planners, citizens and others will be able to use the GIS to recombine data layers to more effectively evaluate the impact of current and future development," Day said.

At the end of the project, the GIS will be transferred to and maintained by local officials in the Laurel Ridge area. Day and other Penn State GIS experts will train

future users of the system in workshops held at Penn State and in the Laurel Ridge area.

Penn State's Ag Progress Days features more than 500 acres of educational and commercial exhibits, tours and machinery demonstrations. It is held at the Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center at Rockspring, nine miles southwest of State College on Route 45.



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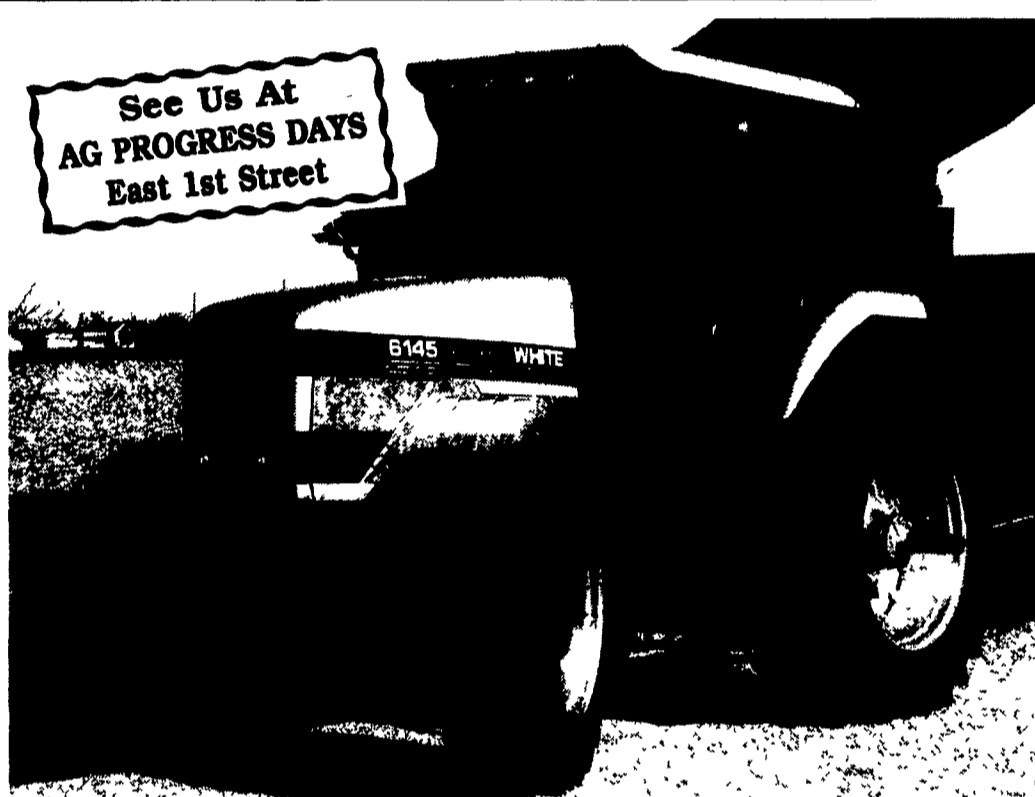
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