

Bob Lauffer, ag instructor at Garden Spot, lifts the tray bearing hydroponically growing cucumbers, lettuce, and basil as part of the "aquaponics" experiment in the new greenhouse. The display uses the nutrients available in fish water to feed the plants.

New Greenhouse Provides Learning Center As Ag Education Evolves

ANDY ANDREWS
Lancaster Farming Staff

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — Twenty-four years ago, according to Cliff Day, a Garden Spot High School ag science instructor, the school's agriculture department assembled a glass greenhouse on a wagon bed and took it to the elementary schools around town, demonstrating one aspect of agriculture education at work.

At a dedication ceremony on Tuesday afternoon, the work of promoting ag education evolved to a newly constructed greenhouse measuring 48 feet by 17½ feet, and involving all aspects of the school's Grassland FFA chapter and students from across the science curriculum.

About 150 gathered at the school's new facility, a three-bay, gutter-connected greenhouse constructed through a cooperative effort paid in part by the Rural Youth Development Fund program, area businesses, and lots of volunteer time by the FFA alumni, staff, and FFA members.

"For anyone who has any doubts about the direction that we're taking in education, moving away from sitting in the classroom to moving more toward performance-based education, being able to not only know something but be able to use it, walk in there and take a look, and you will see what young people are going to be more and more asked to do, not just in this program, but in other areas," said Don Carroll, Jr., state secretary of education.

According to school administration and staff, not only FFA members, but students throughout the school can utilize the facilities for various projects. The FFA chapter will administer some of the projects, and much of the material grown in the house will be sold at a special stand (to be constructed later), with proceeds to benefit the chapter.

According to Boyd Wolff, state secretary of agriculture, funding for the greenhouse was one of 95 different projects over the past 20 months, totalling about \$325,000, from the Rural Youth Development Funds program. The program, according to Wolff, has also provided money for ag awareness projects, several farm safety projects, environmental science programs, seminars on careers in agriculture, programs to overcome rural barriers, and partial scholarships for students to attend youth institutes and leadership development seminars.

"We're no longer sending many of our students back to the farm," said Wolff. Wolff said the project will help FFA'ers "to pursue productive and important careers in agriculture."

"We have an aggressive, energetic, goal-oriented agriculture staff," said Bill Rohrer, superintendent of Eastern Lancaster County School District. "These individuals . . . are in touch with their environment."

Rohrer told those present that the ag department recognized the need for more space, literally, to conduct environmental science projects. He said the department recognized the changing face of agriculture, "from the traditional field crop and large animal production to vegetables and other products . . . a vehicle to aid the transition in ag technology."

Studies to be undertaken include the science of "aquaponics," which combine elements of fish agriculture and using waste water projects as feed for plants. Also, flowers will be grown and sold according to season, and the students will study aspects of horticulture related to vegetable production, bedding plants, and landscaping.



The ribbon-cutting ceremony during the Grassland FFA Greenhouse Dedication ceremony featured, from left, Connie Zelsert, Grassland vice president, operations; Darryl Weaver, Grassland FFA alumni vice president; Don Reed, Garden Spot High School principal; James Huber, chairman of Lancaster County Commissioners; Don Carroll, Jr., Pennsylvania secretary of education; Sen. Noah Wenger; Boyd Wolff, Pennsylvania secretary of agriculture; Rep. Terry Scheetz; and Bill Rohrer, superintendent, Eastern Lancaster County School District.

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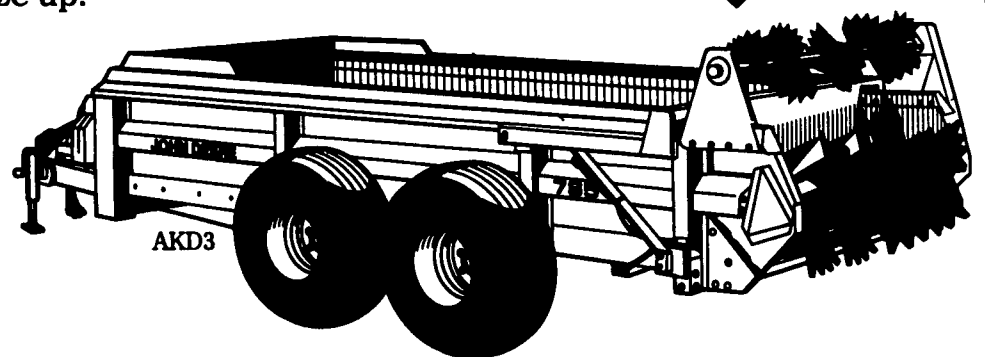
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