

Master Farmers Named At Luncheon

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The Master Farmer Program, now in its 60th year, recognizes farmers from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and West Virginia for high achievement in farming and community service. The program is sponsored by Pennsylvania Farmer magazine and Cooperative Extension in the Mid-Atlantic states.

Janet Knouse is one of five Pennsylvania farmers recognized as 1994 Master Farmers at an awards luncheon held this week in conjunction with the 78th Pennsylvania State Farm Show.

Knouse is president and general manager of Knouse Fruitlands, Inc., an 1800-acre family farm corporation consisting of nine farms with the main office located in Arendtsville. Their crops are apples, peaches and nectarines.

Knouse has two sons and a daughter who are employed with the corporation. Milton is vice president and production manager of Franklin County Orchards. Brian is vice president and production manager of Adams and Cumberland County Orchards. Tonya is corporate secretary, assistant treasurer and data processing manager.

The Knouse family uses integrated pest management to help decrease the use of chemicals on their fruit trees. They regularly have soil analyses done and are converting orchards from standard size rootstocks to semi-dwarf and dwarf trees to increase production and make harvesting easier.

Janet Knouse is director of the growers' cooperative called Knouse Foods. She serves as the advisory board of Farmers Bank and Trust and is director of the Grower's Equipment Center, which is owned by 12 local farmers. She has served on the Board of York Farm Credit for five years and has been director of Rice Fruit Company for 16 years.

David and Phoebe Bitler

David and Phoebe Bitler were also recognized.

The Bitlers own and operate Vista Grande, a 90-cow dairy farm located in Fleetwood. They strive for maximum milk production by continually improving their herd management and genetics. Their

annual herd average is 21,537 pounds of milk. In addition, they raise steers for dairy beef.

They grow much of their own forage and grain and employ a crop consultant to help with soil testing, integrated pest management and nutrient management. Working with the state Soil Conservation Service, they have constructed an animal waste facility, have established new filter strips in some fields and have improved existing sod waterways.

The Bitlers have worked to develop positive public relations in their county. As the Berks County Dairy Promotions Coordinator, Phoebe Bitler has coordinated the Berks County Dairy Festival and Berks County Dairy Nite. The Bitlers also have provided their beef customers with a newsletter containing recipes and nutritional information.

The Bitlers are members of the national and state Holstein Associations, the Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association and the Berks Holstein Club. David was named Regional Outstanding Young Farmer Under 30 and the Kutztown Jaycees Outstanding Young Farmer.

Art and Duane Hershey

Also named in the 1994 Master Farmer Program were Art and Duane Hershey.

The Hersheys own and operate Ar-Joy Farms, a 70-cow dairy farm located in Cochranville. By studying the Holstein breed and using top-quality bulls, they have been able to develop a herd of 80 percent home-bred cattle that produce more than 25,000 pounds of milk on a rolling herd average.

The Hersheys recently installed a new ventilation system that replaces air every 45 seconds, creating a 2.5 mile-per-hour air

flow through the barn. They also use a computer to help them keep more accurate records and prepare and budget for the coming year.

In 1986, with help from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Hersheys built a liquid manure system with a six-month capacity. Now they haul manure only twice a year and plow it under within 24 hours, allowing a great reduction in fertilizer costs.

They also have a full nutrient management plan, which includes the installation of a sod waterway as well as a pit at the bottom of the barnyard to catch rainwater and barnyard manure and keep it from running into a crossing stream that ultimately empties into the Chesapeake Bay.

In 1982, Art Hershey was elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly as State Representative for the 13th district. For his first two years as a representative, he came home each night to assist on the farm and did the milking on weekends when the assembly was not in session.

In 1967, Ar-Joy Farms was selected to be a Penn State Demonstration Farm. In 1987, Ar-Joy Farms received the Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Conservation Award, and in 1989 the farm was named a Dairy of Distinction.

Robert Ott

Robert Ott is another Master Farmer.

Ott owns and manages Ott's Farm and Greenhouses, a 50,000-square-foot production greenhouse complex in New Alexandria. His wife, Sally, handles the payroll and bookkeeping. Employing a full-time grower, an assistant grower and seasonal workers, the operation produces nearly one million plants each year for sale as finished plants or

to be sold to other growers for finishing.

Crops grown by the Otts include poinsettias, hanging baskets, bedding plants, tulips, hyacinths, lilies and mums. They also have grown field vegetables and vegetable transplants. Sixty percent of their finished product is marketed and pre-sold to organizations that sell flowers as fundraisers, such as churches, high school groups and 4-H clubs.

The Otts have adopted innovative practices to improve productivity and profitability. With the help of two daughters with graduate degrees in information systems, they have developed computerized systems to control crop production timetables, inventories, payroll and accounting.

Their technological improvements have enhanced efficiency and reduced labor cost per unit. They use an automatic seeder, under-pot heating, flat-filling and pot-filling machines, conveyors, rolling benches to maximize growing area, automatic misting and watering systems and high-pressure sodium lights to aid in propagation.

Ott has been active in several farm, civic, fraternal and service organizations, including the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, the Poinsettia Growers Association, Friends of 4-H, Loyal Order of Moose, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Lions International. He served on the board of directors of both the Western Pennsylvania Flower Growers Association and the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association, and was a member of the Westmoreland County Extension Committee.

Dennis Wolff

Dennis Wolff is another master

farmer.

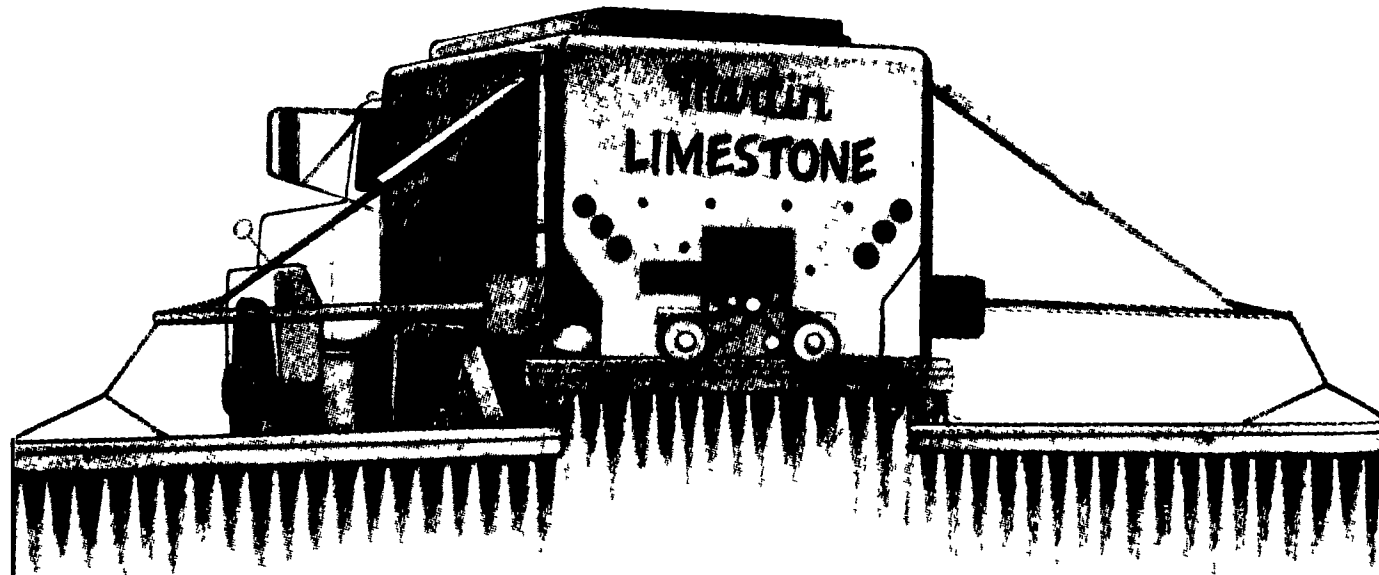
Wolff and his wife, Lois, own and operate Pen-Col Farms, a 580-cow dairy farm in Millville. The operation also includes a purebred cattle business, which has grown along with the international market for cattle and embryos. The Wolffs devote much time to studying market trends and finding ways to improve market share.

They use embryo transfer to maintain their herd's genetic standing. They also have improved harvesting and feeding systems on the farm by using dump wagons, trenches and a mixer truck. To reward employees for the profitability of their divisions, they also have developed a bonus program.

The Wolffs are completing a new 32-cow tie stall barn for their purebred breeding herd and will turn their original barn into a commercial milking barn for 160 cows in order to better track each division of their business.

Wolff is a member of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, the Pennsylvania Holstein Association, the Columbia-Luzerne Holstein Club and the Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association. Dennis Wolff was appointed to the Pennsylvania Animal Health Commission by Governor Robert Casey.

More than 200 farmers were nominated for the Master Farmer Program this year. Judges of the final round were Sam Garrison, assistant secretary of agriculture for New Jersey; John Crowgey, vice president of special credit at the Farm Credit Bank of Baltimore; and Robert Sams, assistant to the dean for communications and external relations in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.



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