

AG Progress Days

Penn State AG Science

*We're More Than You Think™***Farm Link
At Ag Progress**VERNON ACHENBACH JR.
Lancaster Farming Staff

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — A new, nonprofit program run by the state has been set up as of July 13 to help the agricultural community continue into the next generation.

It's called, "Farm Link."

A booth at the Penn State Ag Progress Days, August 16, 17, and 18, in Rockspring, has been planned so that anyone can stop in to ask questions and see how much help they can get, at no cost, to either find a farm, or find a young person desiring to enter into family farming.

The program is being run through the state agency, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (CRP), located at 212 Locust St., in Harrisburg. The CRP is a legislative agency, set up by the state's lawmaking bodies to serve as a publicly funded focal point for rural policy development.

Marion Bowlan, who is a third-generation family farmer living in Lancaster County, has been appointed the Farm Link coordinator and has been working to educate the agricultural community about the program, working with other organizations to establish a working relationship, drafting potential applications and reviewing working programs in other states to get ideas on how to make the Pennsylvania program become helpful, established and efficient.

Bowlan's position is funded for a year. She said her specific task is to start up Pennsylvania's program, "... setting up a database that can match people interested with getting out of farming with people interested in getting into farming."

The program was established by a large group of people representing a variety of agricultural interests, but all with the common desire to stop the trend of the disappearance of family farms in the state.

Using the lead set by 23 other states, the group decided that a Farm Link program should be managed by a pro-agricultural, non-profit agency that can protect the confidences of interested people. The Pa. Center for Rural Development, which is funded by the legislature, was selected as the most obvious existing agency to house, and manage the program.

"We want to set up a transitional arrangement suitable to both parties, with the idea in mind that the retiring farmer would be eventually bought out," Bowlan said.

The program is to offer a variety of services through other interested organizations, such as the Pa. Department of Agriculture, the USDA services, the Farm Credit organization, etc., and "... provide information and education to entering farmers and exiting farmers," she said.

According to Bowlan, the basic services of the program, in addition to matching up people with similar interests and goals, would be to provide beginning farmers with education on such things as finances and budgeting and setting realistic goals, and to provide the outgoing farmer with education about retirement, etc.

The financial stability of both parties is of tantamount concern to all involved, according to Bowlan. But as well, she said there are lot of other considerations.

She said in the planning stages are local workshops on all those issues related to the generational transference of a farm.

Bowlan said that at the Ag Progress booth, she will have program information available and she will field questions.

"I will be on hand all three days to talk to individuals interested in exiting or entering farming," she said in a statement. "Information describing the program will be available, as well as questionnaires for prospective farmers and farm owners/landholders."

The booth is to be located on West 11th Street, near the conservation tent, in the Ag Progress Tent City at Rockspring. She said the location on a map is "L."

The Harrisburg office telephone is (717) 787-9555.



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