

Brosius Nominated Pennsylvania Agricultural Secretary

(Continued from Page A1)

people of his greatness. He has always believed you should be straightforward and honest, do your best, work hard, and if you did and were successful, other people would notice and would agree.

One of the areas of service to fellow farmers for Brosius has been on the Agway board of directors. His district goes from the lower end of the Delmarva Peninsula up to the Blue Mountains in the Poconos. The area is rich in farmland and good farmers. But he noted that he is not the chairman of the board; he is the vice chairman.

"You see, I'm not the guy who gives the annual report," Brosius said. "I'm the guy behind him. Maybe you could

in the early '70's, he was forced into the retail market. Every day for one summer the family put mushrooms in little over-wrap packages and loaded them into the station wagon to sell store to store along Route 30 from Downingtown to York. This was hard work, and Brosius laughed when he said the mushrooms got very cheap by the time he got out past York. But in this experience was born a philosophy that continues to be part of the business. "The closer you get to the consumer the more of the consumer's dollar you get." Today Marlboro Mushrooms go directly to New York City wholesale accounts.

"It's not easy, but it can be done," Brosius said. "I am

We have limited resources. That's the key. You can go out with ambitious plans, but you know government has no money to give back to you that it didn't take from you first. If you don't stray too far from this concept, you realize you can't do anything for which you can't pay.

"That's the way we run our business at home. A lot of things we don't have. But what we have is paid for. I'm not critical of those who have everything new that comes down the road. But I like to watch that new thing a little while and say we don't need to be on the early bandwagon. But we do need to be careful we don't fail to accept proven practices.

"That's why I think the relationship with Penn State is so critical. Penn State provides practical application of the new technology. You need basic research and sometimes this is hard to sell to both the farmers and the politicians. But the part of the research dollars that move through the Department of Agriculture is geared for practical applications. Maybe you need to put out a fire or help in some way to keep farmers' heads above water or a step up on their competition."

The list of Brosius's goals for the department include a farmer friendly DER regulatory program for Pennsylvania agriculture and pesticide reform that brings policy in line with today's sophisticated scientific technology.

"Zero pesticide tolerance is a great goal, but we need to encourage realistic pesticide reform," Brosius said. "Very little water you have ever drunk would hit that zero tolerance. Testing equipment has become so sophisticated that you can't get zero tolerance.

"I don't promote stream pollution or poor conservation practices. I don't know any farmers who do. But in the past we have had the problem of inabil-

"You cannot keep the farm in the family if you can't keep the family on the farm."--Charles Brosius

call me a leader of the followers or the glue that helps keep the board members with diverse backgrounds together.

"I don't think I'm the world's best orator. I stumble and trip over my tongue and lose my way in conversations sometimes. But I have always tried to be straightforward with farmers and be honest with them even when I must tell them things they don't want to hear. I think I have some credibility in this, and maybe I can use that experience in the department of ag."

Brosius will need to be confirmed by the state senate, and he intends to meet with all 50 senators before the confirmation hearings.

MARLBORO MUSHROOMS

The Brosius family is best known for their Marlboro Mushrooms company that ships five tractor trailer loads of mushrooms to the Hunts Point Terminal Market in New York City each week. In addition, Marlboro mushrooms have been shipped up and down the East coast and as far west as Dallas.

Mushrooms are grown continuously in 115,000 square feet of growing facilities with annual production of over 2.5 million pounds. In addition, they broker and re-pack mushrooms from other growers and deliver daily to wholesale markets.

Present staff includes 39 full-time and 18 part-time employees. Hay, wheat, and soybeans are also grown on the 450-acre farm.

All three sons of Charles and Jane Brosius are graduates of Penn State and back home with specific sole responsibility areas in the business.

Mahlon (Mickey) and his wife Karen have two children, Amanda and Corey. Mickey is in charge of the packing and marketing operation.

resistant to the attitude that farmers have that you can't go directly to the consumer with your products. Not everyone will succeed, but some will. It's like taking the farm market concept one step further.

"Gov. Ridge proposes marketing, not just promoting Pennsylvania products. This may include exports to China, Europe, or Mexico. But my concept also includes just exporting Pennsylvania products out of state. I don't have a fancy slogan for Pennsylvania products yet. Maybe we will develop one at PDA; I don't know. But Pennsylvania farmers have the best geographic location and climate. Pennsylvania farmers don't need to take a back seat to anyone. Did you realize we are within 24 hours by refrigerated trailer to half the people in the U.S.?"

"The closer you get to the consumer the more of the consumer's dollar you get."--Charles Brosius

"I am convinced that the old philosophy of farmers that we take great pride in our production but stop marketing at the end of the farm lane must change," Brosius said. "We fill the milk tank or the truck with grain and take a lot of pride in 230 bushels of corn per acre. But when it comes to selling, we say we don't know about that, and we take whatever price someone offers. We need to cooperate as groups of farmers to do together what we can't do alone.

"People ask us why we sell mushrooms in New York City," Brosius said. "But in New York City we have 15

ity to get DER to understand and be part of helping agriculture to succeed.

"The nutrient management laws are in place, and I don't think farmers disagree, but it may be hard to administer. It's not enough to say you can't spread manure. We need a plan that helps us do it in the right place and at the right time."

In 1978 Brosius was named a Pennsylvania Master Farmer. He is currently chairman of the Hershey Medical Center Advisory committee and member of The Penn State University presidential selection committee. In 1994 he was elected to the board of directors of The Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry and he is a former director and secretary of the American Mushroom Institute and former chairman of the Chester County Agriculture Development Council.

"When farmers go to talk to legislators about the things they want, legislators frequently become confused because farmers don't agree on what it is they really want," Brosius said. "Then no one gets anything done.

"I have always thought that when I was most successful was when I have been part of a winning team. To me, a team player is more important than going out for a lot of personal credit for something you thought you accomplished yourself. I sincerely believe Pennsylvania agriculture can move ahead profitably into the next century. I am honored to have this opportunity to represent Pennsylvania farmers in Gov. Ridge's cabinet."

"You know government has no money to give back to you that it didn't take from you first."--Charles Brosius

Tom and his wife Tammy have two children: Victoria and Melissa. Tom is composting manager, plant engineer, and head mechanic.

And Harold and his wife Doris have one son, Kile. Harold is in charge of the growing operation and labor management.

The farming operation consists of several farms put together over the years. The house on the home farm was built in 1854 but is not old by local standards, as other houses in the community date back an additional 100 years. The Brosius grandchildren represent the seventh generation on the farm.

DAIRY FARMER

People focus on Brosius as the mushroom farmer from Chester County. But when he graduated from Penn State in 1952 with a bachelor's degree in dairy science, he came home to what was at the time a family dairy and general farm. In 1957 and 1958 the Brosius Guernsey herd was recognized at the top of the Chester County production list. They also had steers, pigs, and chickens, too.

The mushroom business was started by Grandfather Charles Brosius back about 1915 in the basement of the farm house. This was done for winter work for the family, much like tobacco is the winter work in Lancaster County. When they restored the house in the early '70s, the floor boards were warped from the steam created by the mushrooms in the basement. Shelves in odd configurations in the basement that are used to store canned fruits and vegetables were originally the mushroom beds.

As time went by, all the buildings, the barn, chicken house, hog barn, and the silo were converted to grow mushrooms.

At the time, growing mushrooms was not the science it is today. The Italian immigrants that came to work the stone and marble quarries around Avondale brought the skill with them. That's why the mushroom business happened in southern Chester County.

When Brosius lost his wholesale market for mushrooms

million plus people. That's as many people as on the continent of Australia. And we have all the different ethnic groups of the world brought together to whom we can sell. Just think of the opportunity to market Pennsylvania products to a population as large as a continent.

"Marketing is a favorite subject. Maybe I can use my experience in the Department of Agriculture," Brosius said.

MARKETING AND REGULATING

As head of the state ag department, Brosius will inherit both marketing and regulatory responsibility of the food industry from pre-harvest to the grocery store and restaurants. New laws at the end of the last state legislative session placed responsibility for consolidating statutes related to the commercial feed act and the establishment of organic food and maple syrup certification programs. In addition, the restaurant inspection program was taken from DER to PDA.

It's this restaurant inspection program that is particularly challenging to the department and to the ag community at large. But Brosius believes this inspection program should be in the department of agriculture. He thinks it gives farmers the opportunity to help people understand what food safety is all about and provides a marketing tool to help encourage people to use fresh vegetables, meat, and other foods.

Brosius was elected to the the Board of Trustees of The Pennsylvania State University in 1989. This position has given him an excellent opportunity to learn about the internal operation of both the College of Agricultural Sciences and the University.

"You have a tendency to be an advocate of the ag sciences," Brosius said. "And we have some challenges. But I want to make the department of ag a cohesive unit, both with New Bolton Center and the College of Agricultural Sciences.

"We have so many opportunities to put together a successful organization that doesn't need to be competitive.

