

# Williams Farm Site For 60th Anniversary Of Conservation Effort

**VERNON ACHENBACH JR.**  
Lancaster Farming Staff  
MIDDLETOWN (Dauphin Co.) — The years of social and governmental efforts to promote stewardship of the land was applauded last Friday as federal and state officials gathered in Middletown at the Tom and Theresa "Tiz" Williams' family farm to recognize the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The recognition event was held in the front lawn of the Williams' farmhouse, at Bryncoed Farms, a 280-head commercial Jersey dairy operation on 200 owned acres and 100 rented.

Williams was named 1995 Dauphin County Conservation Farmer of the Year, and was featured in the April 29 issue of Lancaster Farming.

If the name and acronym, "NRCS," aren't initially recognizable, that's because the agency has been reorganized and renamed within the past year. The agency was formerly called the Soil Conservation Service, or more informally, the "SCS."

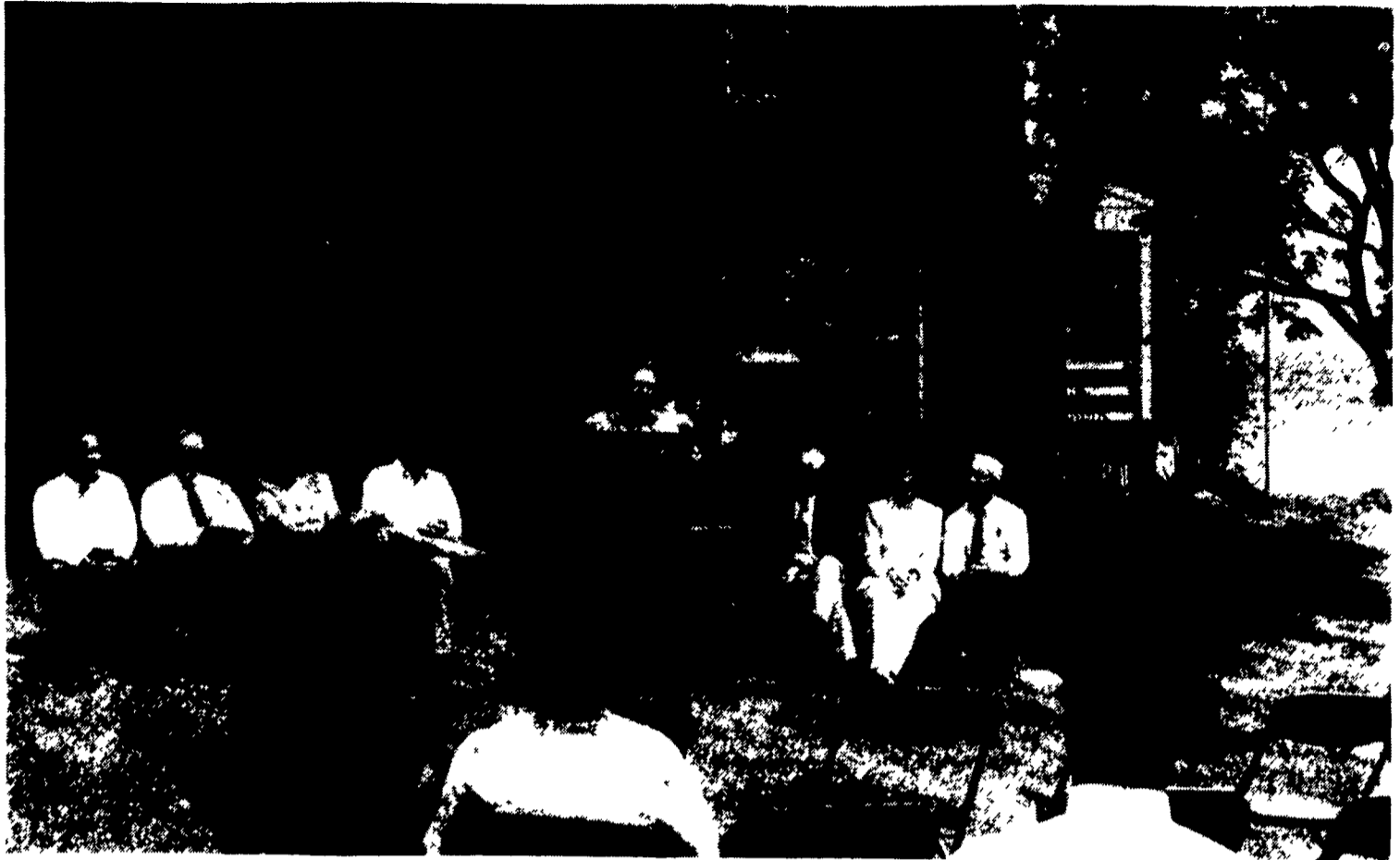
The change in name was part of a plan by former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy to streamline the federal agricultural agency, eliminate waste and improve services.

As part of that strategy, last October the previous Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) became the Consolidated Farm Services Agency (CFSA), with added responsibilities transferred from other areas; while the SCS, again with some changes, became the NRCS.

The name change also reflects the fact that while soil conservation may have been the primary selling point to get the agency started, the result of soil conservation has been to boost the conservation of fresh water and other resources.

The devastation of the Dust Bowl, the Depression and slow adoption of sound tilling and cropping practices (which actually had been available for years prior to the Dust Bowl), made more and more people realize that continuing to till sloped, unterraced fields results in the loss of the land for dependable cropping.

Meanwhile, it should be understood that many more people farmed, and while there were some good farmers, many more still conducted cropping practices that depleted not only the nutrients from the soils, but the soil itself, leaving the remaining topsoil suitable only for tough weeds, nothing, or requiring heavy and repeated fertilization to compen-



From his front lawn, Tom Williams addresses an audience observing the 60th anniversary of the USDA's conservation efforts. From the left, sitting, are program participants Bernard Hoffnar, executive director of the Pa. Association of Conservation Districts; George Wolff,

agricultural/environmental lobbyist; Janet Oertly, state conservationist NRCS; Brad Hicks, television newscaster; Charles Brosius, secretary of agriculture; Rep. Sheila Miller, R-Berks; and Richard VanNoy, chief of the Division of Conservation Districts.

sate for the lack of soil structure.

Also, technology and education widely enjoyed today, wasn't necessarily available to everyone then, though it existed, through such institutions as the Pennsylvania State University which had originally been an agricultural school.

Further, agricultural education was stressed by the nation's founding fathers, who in a business decision for the young country, began the practice of subsidizing county fairs to spread agricultural education.

Credited to George Washington in some reports, the practice of education through county fairs was done so farmers could better learn the latest agricultural techniques and possible cash crops, and thus put America in a better position to compete in international markets.

While perhaps oversimplifying the history, the conservation movement came along as early short-term profiteers followed commercial trappers and hunters (they harvested in a fashion similar to some modern commercial ocean fishing, in that once very plentiful stocks of wildlife were depleted or very nearly depleted before the practices were stopped through a lack of wild animal life to harvest and sell), and stripped forests for lumber, the ground for minerals and the soil for crops and moved

on, leaving environmental devastation in the wake.

Those who took up the lands after the first wave were left with little to continue to use, but the land and other resources responded to conservation practices. They still do.

The general concept of conservation is simple, while achieving it has been more difficult.

The key concept is to use land practices which retain soil, water and nutrients on the farm, for the health of the farm.

The approach to farming this way is to provide long-term and continued benefits.

One of the most significant early practices promoted was the use of contour plowing. Contour plowing, simply, is the practice of creating rows that run along the contours of the land, to create, in effect a series of mini-terraces, which act to dam the flow of surface water, or impede it from streaming downhill.

Williams farm was recognized because of the many practices implemented on the farm starting with Tom's father Sam Williams, who was one of the first in his area to adopt a conservation plan through the SCS, and installed a farm pond 60 years ago to impede the flow of water and soil from the farm, while also creating a supply of water to use during drought.

Tom has added to the practices greatly, such as using newspaper bedding and manure injection to build organic matter which acts to further retain nutrients and moisture, continuing the development of the farm into the lush-looking site it currently is.

While most Pennsylvania farms utilize some form of conservation farming, even though many practices may be considered traditional now, the USDA Soil Conservation Service, through the concepts of those who originally called for the agency's creation and the workings of many concerned with carrying out those objectives and goals, is recognized for its successes in helping people farm better for themselves and those around them.

A proclamation from Gov. Tom

Ridge and one from the state House of Representatives were read aloud. Both documents were presented to the Pennsylvania NRCS office, with its headquarters building in Harrisburg near the state Department of Agriculture Building.

Rep. Sheila Miller, R-Berks, presented the House proclamation, that she sponsored.

Proclamations normally are constructed as a series of statements preceded by "Whereas," with a the final summary statement beginning with "Therefore ..."

In the proclamation Rep. Miller sponsored, it states that April 23-29 was Natural Resources Conservation Week and,

"Whereas, (sic) the people across this land wish to live in harmony with natural resources, and wish to bequeath a better Earth to their children and grandchildren; and

"Whereas, conservationists across this beautiful country work hand in hand with the American people to conserve all natural resources to create a healthy land; and

"Whereas, leadership for conservation of natural resources on private lands is provided by a partnership of conservation districts, state conservation agencies, and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service; and

"Whereas, it is fitting that we show appreciation for the efforts of landowners and landusers to conserve our natural resources by attempting to increase awareness among all Americans of the importance of our natural resources.

"Now therefore, the House of Representatives ... pays tribute to the (NRCS) upon this momentous occasion, gratefully acknowledges the efforts of conservationists to protect and preserve our natural resources; urges all citizens to join in recognizing the importance of conservation and in celebrating this great land ..."

Secretary of Agriculture Char-

les Brosius presented the proclamation from Gov. Tom Ridge, which dedicated June 2 as Natural Resources Conservation Day.

"Whereas, citizens across the commonwealth of Pennsylvania seek to live in harmony with natural resources and strive to discover a cleaner, less waste-filled environment for our children and grandchildren; and

"Whereas, conservationists across Pennsylvania work with commonwealth citizens to conserve natural resources; and

"Whereas, leadership for the conservation of natural resources on private land is provided through a partnership of conservation districts, state conservation agencies, and the USDA's (NRCS); and ...

"Whereas, the (NRCS) ... was created on April 27, 1935 ... it is celebrating 60 years of preserving the nation's soil and water resources on private lands; and

"Whereas, we will continue to raise awareness of the critical importance of our natural resources;

"Therefore, I, Tom Ridge, ... do hereby proclaim June 2, 1995 as Natural Resources Conservation Day to commemorate the creation of NRCS, and urge all citizens to recognize the importance of conservation in our communities."

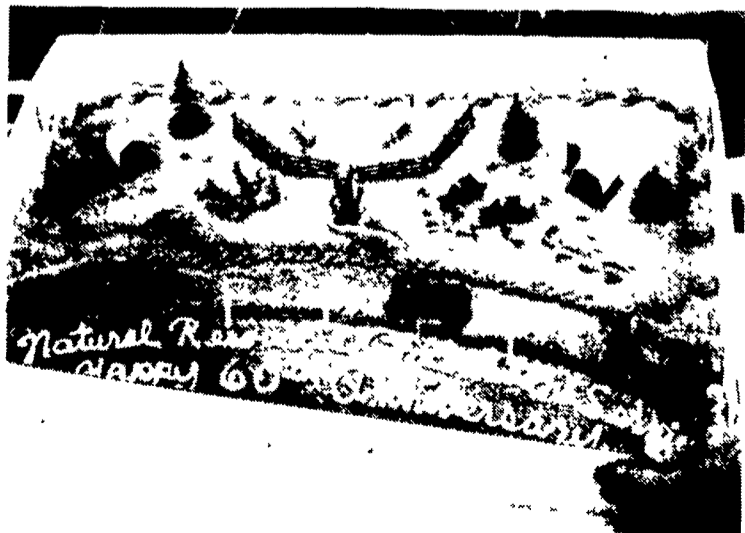
Secretary Brosius addressed the crowd a second time, delivering the keynote address.

Brosius said he knew and admired Sam Williams and the Williams family. He said that Sam has served to many as "... a role model of integrity, honesty and perseverance."

He also spoke about Sam's son Tom continuing the commitment to making the farm a model of conservation, and how Tom's parents Sam and Carol passed on their love of the soil to their children.

The secretary talked about the progress of the conservation movement, the history and legacy of Pennsylvania in helping forge

(Turn to Page A27)



This cake is decorated in honor of the 60th anniversary of USDA federal-state-county and individual cooperation for conservation.