



Everyone gathers around Great-grandma Fletcher in the middle of a soybean field that has been in the family for 100 years.



Gov. Tom Ridge makes the official Century Farm presentation to Robert Lange.

## Ridge Presents Century Award To Willisbrook

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MALVERN (Chester Co.) — Farms were honored in general, and Willisbrook Farm in particular, when Pennsylvania's Gov. Tom Ridge visited this horse and vegetable farm Wednesday morning to present a Century Farm Certificate to Robert Lange. Five generations have lived on the farm, and Lange is a family member of the present generation of farm owners. Jane Gordon Coxie Fletcher, 95, a daughter of the original family owner, was on hand too and provided the inspiration for the award ceremony.

"You, Mrs. Fletcher, in many ways help us define what we are as a state and what we are as a people in Pennsylvania," Ridge said. "Your life tells our story. You are a link to the past, and happily you are our hope for the future. In you we see a legacy that stands for nearly a personal century and a heritage we are compelled to carry on," Gov. Ridge said.

Ridge said agriculture's promise is a promise we must all strive to keep. "We are pleased to be part of the nation's bread basket from the very beginning, he said. "Farming is the backbone of our Commonwealth, and we all know that's why Pennsylvania's farmland preservation program is so very important. It is in the interest of our 12 million Pennsylvanians, if they work and live on the farm or not."

In his introduction, Charles Brosius, state ag secretary, said productive acres lost to buildings are lost to production agriculture forever. Even with development pressure, Chester County remains with over 1,500 farms and continues to be a major ag county.

"We cannot keep the farm in the family if we cannot keep the family on the farm," Brosius said.

The 236-acre Willisbrook Farm has been preserved for agriculture through the state farmland preservation program and the natural land trust. Lange accepted the award on behalf of his family.

"When you look out over the fields, what you see is not much different than if you were looking 100 years ago," Lange said. "That's neat. And in another 100 years it will not look much different than now because all this land is protected for agriculture. I think this is important. Family heritage and farmland preservation are the most important things a family can have.

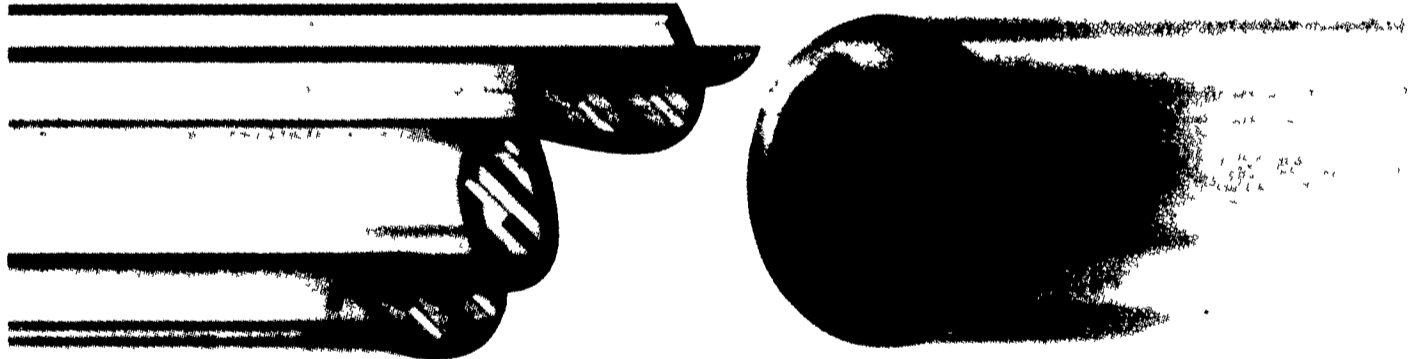
Lange's farm, which has been in his family since 1896, produces pick-your-own strawberries, sweet corn and pumpkins. The farm also serves as a boarding stable for horses.

The Century Farm Program, administered by the state agriculture department, recognizes farms that have been owned by the same family for the past 100 years. A family member must still live on the land. Since the beginning of the program in 1976, over 1,700 farms have been recognized. Thirty-seven farms have been honored in 1996.

The Farmland Protection program was initiated in 1989 with a \$100 million bond issue approved by Pennsylvania's voters. The program allows the state and counties to purchase development rights to guarantee that farms will

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