

Farm-City Events Create Forum For Friendships

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The local extension service office usually has information on what is being planned, even if it isn't directly involved.

How the Farm-City programs develop, how they are supported, and the effectiveness of a program in creating an atmosphere of peace and a desire for mutual understanding, usually depends upon one thing — the people involved.

For those in counties where Farm-City activities are wanting, or absent, the message from those with successful programs is that it doesn't have to be that way.

According to Dyan Yingst, a

spokesperson for the state Department of Agriculture and the state Farm-City Program coordinator, an example of how one person can be a torch for a successful program is Tioga County's director of the county USDA Farm Service Agency office.

Sherry Elder has been involved in helping to start up several Farm-City programs over the years, as she's moved to different counties in job progression.

For her, the Farm-City program is a personal pet project, one of the few ways to really get people together.

The format for success that she's found is to hold a regularly

scheduled, well-advertised summertime Farm-City day, a fall Farm-City banquet, and a job-exchange program.

For Tioga County, the Farm-City Day is held the second Saturday in July. The banquet is held the second week in November and features the previous year's Farm-City Day host-farm family, the current year's host family, and the upcoming year's host family, who are introduced to the audience.

Since becoming a FSA agent, Elder said that she been involved in Farm-City activities.

She was involved in Farm-City events when she worked in Crawford County, in 1976, and when she moved to Fayette County, she helped get a program off the ground. She worked there for two years and then got a chance to move to Tioga County to work at their FSA office.

On the way to here job interview, she said she noticed an attractive farm along Rt. 287, owned by Eric and Dixie Cooledge and thought that it would make a great place to hold a Farm-City Day — proximity to Wellsboro, and other higher density areas, and also to the farming community.

She said she blocked out day and held a meeting to see if there was any interest in a Farm-City event. Eric came to it and their farm became the first site.

The county's seventh Farm-City Day is to be held Saturday, July 12, at Schmelway Farms, Rt. 414, east of Liberty, Ogdensburg.

"Sherry strives to promote positive interactions between farmers, agribusiness and consumers," Yingst said. "She is a very enthusiastic and energetic individual, and the Farm-City Program is fortunate to have her support."

Elders said that key to getting a program started is working first with the farmers who are willing to open up their farm to visitors.

While she admits that she has a passion for being involved with Farm-City activities, she it helps to

always be making contacts for potential future farm families to serve as a host farm of an event.

Other people to approach about getting involved include local business leaders, organizational and local political leaders, such as county commissioners, can lend support. There are FFA and 4-H groups and leaders, and potentially additional groups that can play a role in developing a program.

While there traditionally hasn't been a strong alliance between Farm-City and local fair events, the two would seem to be a natural match, or at least a display about Farm-City activities could be set up at a local fair to garner interest.

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Elders found that other types of relationships can develop through involvement in the program — in 1993, while working with the Raymond Butters family farm for Farm-City Day activities, she met David Butters, one of the Butters' four adult sons.



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