

Farming's Future: Regional Strength Or Coming Calamity?

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — With market demand for healthy, nutritious foodstuffs as solid as ever, it's remarkable that the Northeast's largest industry — agriculture — is also one of its most endangered.

"We're losing farmland at a quicker rate than anybody ever expected," said Jill Schwartz, American Farmland Trust Mid-Atlantic field director. "Working together to save farmland is more critical now than ever before."

Others in farming, government, and communities throughout the region agree.

Presentations about innovative partnering for farmland preservation and ways of enhancing farm vitality are a key part of the "Farming for the Future" conference on Feb. 7-8 at the Nittany Lion Inn on the Penn State Campus, University Park.

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), the conference includes dozens of sessions for food producers, resource managers, other agriculture professionals and consumers, a trade exhibit of sustainable products and services, and plenty of discussion sessions and networking with participants, including the "Chat 'n Chew" cafe.

"To maintain a vibrant agriculture in Pennsylvania and the Northeast, it's time for serious cooperation on behalf of our soil and other resources, our farm families, and our communities," said Tim Bowser, executive director of PASA. "This year's conference looks at a number of ways to encourage cooperation though farm-protection programs, community-based marketing, farm improvement clubs, better grazing, integrated pest control, wise nutrient management, recycling of organic materials ... and more."

Featured presenters include:

- Montana rancher and keynote speaker Tom Elliott, who will describe some of the value-added food production, educational outreach and cooperative marketing methods of his 48,000-acre N-Bar Land and Cattle Co. Elliott and the N-Bar staff market nearly 1,000 head of Angus cattle yearly with the help of on-ranch livestock auctions and the Internet, pasture 3,500 sheep each summer in a cooperative venture with their neighbors and sell bulk organic grains and specialty crops to food stores and restaurants.

- Steve Groff, with the latest on no-till transplanting vegetables

into cover crops to improve soil, manage pests, and increase profits. He'll also review the potential for 15-inch rows to boost corn yields and improve weed control while reducing herbicide costs.

- Maryland organic farmer and county planning commissioner Marty Rice, on Frederick County's AgriFuture Roundtable and other efforts to ensure farming is part of a community's economic development plans. "Farmland more than pays its way in property tax revenues, while residential and commercial development often demand far more in services than they pay in taxes," said Rice, based on results of a recent Roundtable study.

- Dairy farmer Roman Stoltzfoos and other pasture-based producers, hosting a mini-conference on grazing management, meeting nutritional needs of pastured cattle, extending the grazing season, and marketing strategies.

- Eric Gibson, author of Sell What You Sow, on the importance of local markets and educating consumers about your products.

- Compost consultant and soil specialist Will Brinton, founder of Woods End Research Lab in Maine, reviewing ways to minimize expenses when composting

and the latest on using compost for disease suppression in crops.

- Vegetable and dairy sheep farmers Uta and Angelika Luebke of Austria, describing how to build soil health through biologically active compost, nitrogen-fixing cover crops, effective rotations, and reduced tillage.

- Vegetable farmer, regional food system advocate, and closing keynote speaker Elizabeth Henderson, with heartening news on how farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture, food co-ops, and other action-oriented approaches by sustainably minded groups can reinvigorate U.S.

agriculture.

The conference includes input from the New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NYSAWG). Nonprofit, member-based organizations, PASA and NYSAWG promote ecologically sound, economically viable, socially responsible, and community-based food and farming systems.

Walk-in registration and single-day conference attendance will be an option. To find out more or to request conference registration materials, contact PASA, P.O. Box 419, Millheim, PA 16854, (814) 349-9856.



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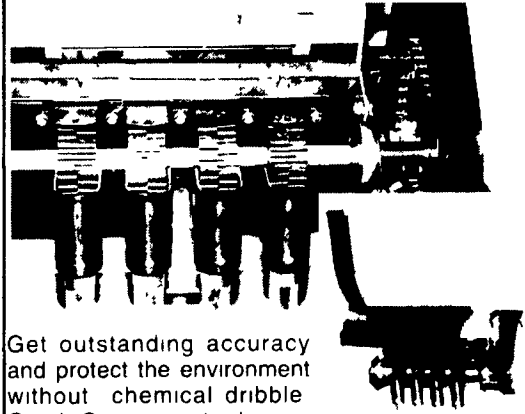
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