

Oberholtzer Farm Is Lancaster's Outstanding Conservation Cooperator

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Lancaster Farming Staff

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — Like a complicated puzzle as seen from the air, cropland on the Oberholtzer Farm moves in mysterious ways — strips that are narrow in fields that are not uniform with rows that end in points, and some rows that simply end for no apparent reason.

But the seven-generation farm, operated by Clair N. and M. Laverne Oberholtzer and family in Mount Joy Township, learned through the years that intensive natural resource management was key to survivability, so that was how the fields were cared for.

For the farm's conservation stewardship, the Oberholtzer family was honored on Thursday night with the Lancaster County Conservation District's 1997 Outstanding Cooperator Award. The family accepted the award at the district's annual banquet, attended by more than 250 at Yoder's Restaurant in New Holland.

According to the district, the farm has many interesting features going all the way back to William Penn. One of these is 50 acres of

Safe Harbor secured the idea with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Pa. DEP. In four months, Safe Harbor stabilized approximately 1,200 feet of badly eroding river bank. In addition, the corporation improved the river corridor by installing a series of rock deflectors that serve to enhance the in-stream habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms.

At the banquet the Youth Conservation School Service Award was granted to Daniel Boyer, 17, son of Diane and Raymond Boyer, Mount Joy. Dan, a senior at Donegal High School, attended the Youth Conservation School in 1993. He then returned as counselor from 1994-1996. As a counselor, Dan provided supervision and leadership to a group of 5-6 students. He is a senior at Donegal High School. After graduation, Dan plans to enter the military.

The district provided special thanks to the Northern Lancaster County Game and Fish Protective Association for support of conservation education in Lancaster County. The club owns a 150-acre farm in northern Lancaster County. They have hosted the Youth



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Conservation School since 1981.

The district presented several awards to those whose efforts highlighted conservation work and

education in the county. L. Nevin Greiner, who is stepping down as co-director of the Lancaster County Youth Conservation School

(which he served since 1989), was honored for his many years of involvement with the school.

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woodland located in four different areas of the farm. Also, there are 16.5 acres of pasture in three different locations.

According to Gerald Heistand of the conservation district, who narrated a slide presentation, the farm has a "lot of history" and challenged any farmer in the county to work the kind of difficult terrain on the Oberholtzer property and still keep conservation in focus.

According to the district, the catalyst for changes to a more conservationally minded approach to farming began in the 1960s with the help from the Elizabethtown Vocation Agricultural Department. Instructor Elvin Hess sparked Clair's interest in having the Soil Conservation Service (now called the Natural Resource Conservation Service) come out to the farm. When plans were put into place, a total of 2,300 feet of waterway and 8,263 feet of terraces were installed.

A few years afterward, a decision was made to place in stripcropping as a best management practice.

Clair took over the dairy farm from his father Samuel in 1974, purchasing it in 1981. Farmland erosion on the west side of Oberholtzer Road was not as crucial as the rest of the farm, but Clair decided it would benefit from additional conservation practices, so 200 feet of waterways and 3,500 feet of terrace were constructed. At the same time, a spring development was installed in the meadow below the barn.

In 1993 a manure storage system was added to the operation with assistance from the Chesapeake Bay Program. Clair followed the district's philosophy of working with erosion control practices before adding a manure storage structure to the operation. The storage structure allows manure to be applied closer to the time the crops can use the nutrients.

The Oberholtzer farm does not have enough manure to meet the nutrient needs, so starter is used for corn and alfalfa

On both owned and rented acreage, the farm supports 75 cows, 25 heifers, and 25 calves. The cropland includes 96 acres of corn, 42 acres of alfalfa, and 27 acres of wheat, with one acre of rye. Proper terraces are key in erosion management. Clair uses a rollover plow so the furrow can be thrown one way three of the four years. The terraces on the farm are not parallel — there are point rows and the strips are not all uniform. So it takes special management strategies each step of the way to ensure the terraces are tilled correctly.

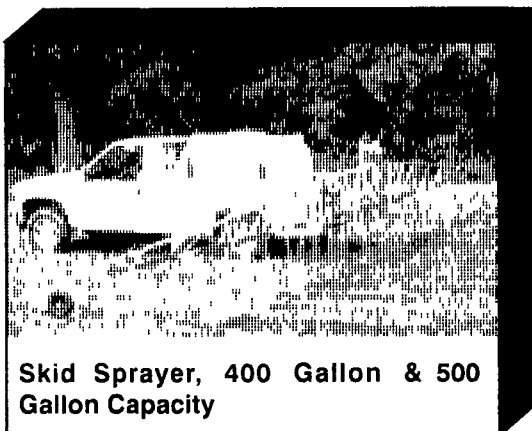
Also at the banquet, a special award was presented to the Safe Harbor Water Power Corp. for the special use of valuable rock material when they neared completion of the Fish Passage Project. The corporation realized they had a surplus of 9,000 cubic yards of rock. Although it would cost additional money, Safe Harbor wanted to donate the material to help in the Conestoga River stream bank stabilization efforts.

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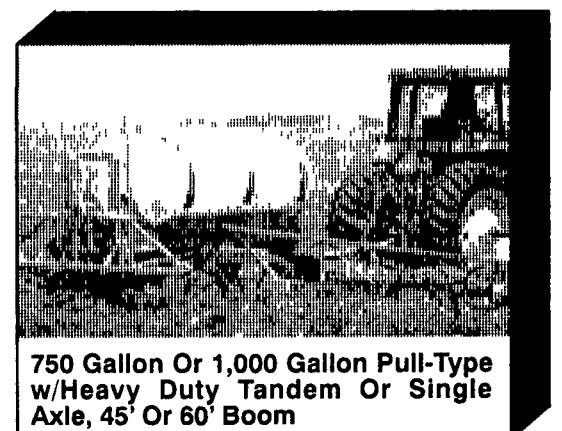


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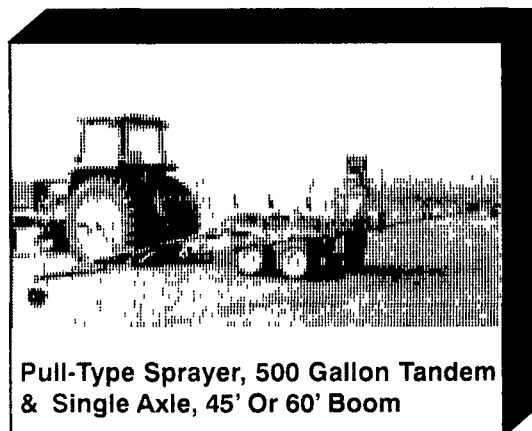
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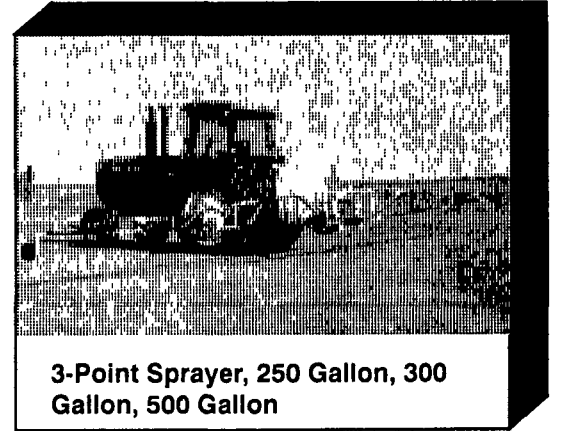
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