

Handling Farm Water Worries A Real 'Art' Form

ANDY ANDREWS

**Lancaster Farming Staff
HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.)** —

Anna Brandt recalls that it was about six years ago when the "water worries" ceased.

It wasn't as if the homestead was getting flooded out or anything. But after a heavy thunderstorm, the rainwater got high enough that "you couldn't get into mow it," she said. The weeds would grow real high and get out of hand.

So six years ago Anna's husband, Art, hired a man to grade a field that contained the spring that would erupt after a thunderstorm. The grading was completed sufficiently high enough to divert the water to a culvert which runs underneath Brandt Rd., which navigates through their farm. The spring water, along with house roofwater, drains into a creek which feeds into the Conewago.

When it thunderstorms, the rain simply is diverted to the culvert. In the past, rains would carry stormwater up to three feet only a short distance from the house.

It was more than 30 years ago that the Brandt's started recognizing the importance of ridding the farm of "water worries" and subsequent soil erosion by signing up with the Dauphin County Conservation District. For all the years since, the Brandt's have worked hard to preserve more soil — they turned a creek which was developing from a spring, eroding soil into a collection pond, into a grazing area with a spring feeder. They

also installed a water collection terrace in order to preserve their soil.

A few years ago they also installed a concrete-lined, earthen-walled manure storage structure which is emptied twice a year.

For all these efforts and more, the Brandt family was honored earlier this year as Dauphin County Conservation Farmers of the Year by the district.

"I grew up across the field here," said Art Brandt, pointing to a nearby farm. Back then, it was a small dairy operated by his father, Ralph Brandt. Ralph then purchased the home dairy on which Art's family works from Art's grandfather, Haram Bricker.

The farm was rented for a time from a dairyman, Harv Schiffer, according to Art.

Where once the farm contained only about 7-8 cows, it has since grown into a dairy milking about 100 cows with about the same number of replacements. Art, who retired from the business with wife Anna, now helps his two sons farm — Ken, 33, who takes care of the cows, and Mel, 43, who manages the fieldwork.

Art and Anna's other son, Dale, 38, works for Richard Alwine as herdsman. Art and Anna also have two daughters, Verna, 45, a banker, and Karen, 33, who helps care for the calves.

The Brandts farm 80 acres on the home farm and care for another 140. They rent additional acreage. Altogether, they manage more than 150 tillable acres, including



For all their conservation work through the years, the Brandt family, including Art, left, and Anna, was honored earlier this year as Dauphin County Conservation Farmers of the Year by the district.

about 100 acres of corn, 40 acres of alfalfa, and about 20 acres of spelt. They manage 30 acres in pasture. The pasture is grazed as an exercise lot.

The Brandts raise all Holstein, about half registered and half grade. On DHIA, the herd averages 18,000 pounds of milk, 594 pounds protein, and 709 pounds fat. They use a TMR from a Lancaster company.

Also, the Brandts raise 34,000 boilers under contract with Charles Poultry, according to Art.

One farm, when purchased in 1969, was already under a conservation plan. The Brandts have been cooperators with the district since 1965.

Contour stripcropping is the conservation mainstay of the farm. Hay strips alternate with corn fields to provide control of water and keep erosion in check. The hay strips are maintained as long as possible, depending on the rotation schedule. "We keep on cutting it as long as it stays," said Art, with about four cuttings a year.

In 1992, a concrete-lined manure storage pit was installed. Manure is scraped out of the lot and dumped into the pit. The manure is emptied twice a year and spread right to the fields.



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A big concern years ago was the potential soil loss from runoff on the side of a hill near a barn. Much of the soil is Ungers-Bucks-Lansdale, well-drained on ridges that have siltstone, shale, and sandstone. Underground pipes were installed to gravity feed spring water to a trough, and additional pipes were laid in to feed the water to a holding pond. Overflow is diverted to a culvert, then into a creek which eventually feeds into the Conewago.

One farm has a lot of the hardpan red clay, which can make tillage uncertain and difficult. If it gets too wet, according to Brandt, it packs easily. If the season is too dry, getting a good crop yield can be difficult.

Art noted one Amish neighbor

who was able to work the clay soil successfully a short while ago with a team of eight horses.

It was turned and he was able to get it fine, said Brandt.

Most tillage on the farmstead is a combination of chisel and disc. The Brandts use some no-till — but best results with no-till can only be obtained in a moist year because of the sandstone conditions. No-till is nearly impossible near the Conewago Creek, which can pack like a hard clay if heavy equipment goes over it when the soil is wet.

But the sandstone soil holds the water better in places.

Contours around the hills retain moisture and there is little runoff. The topsoil remains deep.

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Art and Anna Brandt were presented with a Senate citation and a special citation from the Dauphin County board of commissioners, congratulating the Brandts on the conservation award honor.



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