

**Family Living**  
**Focus**  
 by  
 Lancaster Co.  
 Extension Agent  
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**TV OR NOT TV?**

During the winter months when children are mostly likely to be found indoors, many may be found in front of the television screen during a large portion of the day. We know that children in the U.S. view an average of 3-5 hours of television daily, and that television viewing time increases from the preschool years through the early teens. We also know a lot about the negative effects that television violence and uncensored viewing can have on children. Many parents, myself included, may find themselves asking all-important question "TV or not TV"?

With its unlimited potential for both education and entertainment, it would be wrong to conclude that all television viewing is harmful to children. In fact, television programming that is designed with the child in mind can provide many delightful ways to gain new and different information. I am reminded of every morning as my 1 and 3-year-old delight in watching and learning with Big Bird and Elmo, followed by their favorite purple dinosaur

"Barney." I'm quite sure our mornings would not be the same without these familiar friends!

The key is to establish a healthy pattern of television viewing in your home that meets the needs of all family members, and that fits the values and ideals that you hope to instill in the lives of young children. Here are some suggestions to help you along the way.

- Decide on a maximum time length for television viewing for each family member. This is best done by involving the entire family in the decision. When children help to set the length of their daily television viewing, they will be more likely to cooperate with parents. Remember that when children spend 3-5 hours a day watching television, their time for other productive activities like reading and talking with others is severely limited. Limiting television viewing to one to two hours a day may be a more realistic and satisfying goal for all family members.

- Encourage all family members to avoid random viewing that is just turning on the television to see what might be on or "channel surfing".

Admittedly, I am guilty of the subconscious act of turning on the television at various times when I am not even watching. For many of us, it's almost as if the background noise of the television provides a source of familiar comfort during routine daily activities. Family members should plan their television viewing just as they do other activities. This promotes the idea that television viewing is a privilege and a choice, not just a habit to be taken for granted. When programs are over, parents can turn the television off so that it doesn't lure children into watching other unplanned programs.

- View selected television programs together and discuss the content of the program. If the program supports the family's values and ideals, it provides a wonderful opportunity to reinforce what is most important to family members. Likewise, programs with objectionable topics can also be used as a forum for discussion among family members. The key is for parents to monitor content and help children process new material in a way that is comfortable for all.

- Choose themes and story lines that match children's developmental level. Now, more than ever, we have a wide range of diverse programs and channels to meet the needs of our equally diverse population. We know all too well that many movies, daytime soaps, talk shows and popular nighttime sitcoms contain excessive adult content that is not intended for young children. Parents should stay informed about available programs and encourage those that offer educational as well as

entertainment value for their child.

•Finally, researchers who have studied children's television viewing habits do not recommend no television, rather to balance television viewing with other family activities. Just as we need a variety of foods in our diet, so too can children benefit

from a variety of social and educational experiences. Games, walks, sports, hobbies, reading, activities with friends, cooking activities, and family conservations are alternative activities, they may be surprised to discover many of their hidden family strengths!

**Brush Up Marketing Skills**

**LEWISBURG (Union Co.) — Nancy Roberts Depoe, Penn State Cooperative Extension agent in Union County, said, "After the exceptionally warm weather we experienced in Central Pennsylvania recently, the ground ready for plowing (well, almost) — my thoughts naturally turned to the summer ahead and the season for farm produce stands.**

**"Okay, so I may be rushing the seasons a bit, but good planning takes time and now is a good time to do it, particularly since there are a number of conferences and marketing seminars taking place within the next six weeks. These conferences and seminars are an excellent way to pick up some tips that might improve your business or peak your interest in starting one."**

Here is a list of conferences and seminars you might want to put on your calendar. On Tuesday, January 27, "Marketing is the Key to Success" part of the 1998 Pennsylvania Vegetable Conference to be held in Hershey, for information contact: PA Vegetable Growers Association at (717) 694-3596. The Pennsylvania/Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference

and Trade Show, will be held in Lancaster, February 17-20, for registration information contact Larry Yager, Penn State Cooperative Extension at (717) 334-6272. And a one-day seminar available on Saturday, February 28, in Bartonsville, entitled "Food for Thought for Food Producers" the 2nd Northeast Regional Produce Marketing Seminar; for additional information contact Nancy DePoe, Penn State Cooperative Extension (717) 524-8721.

Each conference is unique; however, there are some general topics in common such as developing your market, what's new for the 21st century, developing attractive displays, and a sharing of marketing success stories.

If you would like information on produce marketing but cannot attend any of these sessions you might want to get on the mailing list for the Direct Farm Marketing Newsletter. You can receive the Direct Farm Marketing Newsletter by contacting Tom Murphy, Penn State Cooperative Extension Lycoming County Office at (717) 327-2350.

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