

Family Living**Focus**

by
**Sandra
Parker Hall**
Clinton County
Cooperative Extension

**My, How Child Care Has Changed**

It seems like yesterday that I was growing up on a farm in north central Pennsylvania, but it isn't.

I am a parent with adult children—oh, my, how the time does fly.

I especially remember as a child, how fortunate I was that my Mom was always there. Typically, we had breakfast before I departed for school and a snack was always available when I returned. My sisters and I would call Mom and there was always an answer. We were the most fortunate, our parents worked side-by-side creating a livelihood for our family. That was more than 40 years ago, and today many things are different.

Today's family is faced with difficult choices about work as well as child care. To keep pace with the financial demands of most families, two paychecks are often necessary. That means at least two individuals are working outside the home. If there are children in the family, then the choice of who and where child care will be provided must be made.

If I was granted just one wish; I wish that all families could choose what is best for their family, based on their many needs, through conversa-

tion and thought, and public support.

This means a couple of things. First, for those families who choose for a parent to stay at home to provide child care, our government must recognize and value this service by providing tax relief through an appropriate avenue. Second, for families working outside the home, there must be affordable, accessible, quality child care based on the freedom of choice.

Did you know that in Pennsylvania, anyone caring for more than three children must be licensed or registered with the PA Department of Public Welfare? There are different types of child care options available:

•Licensed Centers — Providing care for more than 12 children at any given time.

•Group Day Care Homes — Providing care for 7 to 12 children at any given time.

•Family Day Care Home — Providing care for 3 to 6 children at any given time within the provider's home.

•Neighbor/Relative Care — Providing care for fewer than three children at any given time within the child's or provider's home.

The difficult choice is selecting the child care option which best meets your family's needs.

What is the best setting? Who is the best provider? What is the best location? If you would like some ideas to consider when selecting child care, you can contact your county's Penn State Cooperative Extension Office and request the checklist for choosing child care or work through the following.

Take three steps before placing your child with any child care provider.

1. Visit the home or center.
2. Carefully look around.
3. Ask lots of questions.

Here are some things to look for and ask about:

___ Can you visit any time your child is there? Do you feel welcome?

___ Are the caregivers warm, friendly, and clean?

___ Do the caregivers have experience with children? What kind?

___ Do the caregivers treat each child as a special person?

___ Do the caregivers listen and talk to the children?

___ Does the caregivers' approach to child rearing agree with yours?

___ Do caregivers encourage self-help, independence and self-expression?

___ What do the caregivers do when a child is angry or fearful?

___ Is the home or center registered? If not, why not?

___ Is the home clean and comfortable?

___ Is there a fenced-in play area outside?

___ Are all poisons, medicines, and sharp objects stored in a locked area?

___ Is the home or center free from mess or clutter?

___ Is there a first aid kit readily available?

___ Are emergency numbers posted next the the telephone?

___ Is there a room for active and quiet play?

___ Is there a planned program of activities?

___ Are healthy, nutritious snacks and meals served?

___ When are naps taken? What do children sleep on?

___ Are toys, books and playthings available to the children?

___ Are toys clean, safe and in good working condition?

___ Get references from other parents who now have or had children in the home or center.

___ Is this a place I'd like my child to spend the days of his/her life?

During or after your visit, if you have the feeling something isn't quite right, KEEP LOOKING. Trust your feelings. Don't place your child in this home or center.

CAUTION — Remember you're hiring a substitute parent to care for your child, not just a babysitter!

Yes, times have changed and although selecting child care may seem like a tedious process it is worth it. When you are working outside the home, you will feel comfortable knowing your children are receiving the same or better care if you were providing it yourself.

Ag Department Kicks Off New Program

CHESTER (Chester Co.) — On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes Jr. and Secretary of Aging Richard Browdie recently kicked off the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program at the Chester Senior Center.

The program provides eligible Pennsylvania seniors with checks to purchase Pennsylvania-grown fresh fruits and vegetables at their local farmers market through September.

"In Pennsylvania, we produce high-quality fruits and vegetables, and we believe our seniors should be able to enjoy them, too," Hayes said. "Health experts recommend five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily for good health, and this new program is another way we can help keep our elders healthy and able to enjoy all of Pennsylvania's bounty."

Secretary of Aging Richard Browdie said, "Exercise and a nutritious diet are vital components of healthy aging. Our PrimeTime Health wellness promotion program, which is offered in Chester-area senior centers and statewide, affords seniors the chance for learning proper exercises techniques. Now, with this Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program, older persons have a wonderful opportunity to maintain a healthy diet by purchasing home-grown fruits and vegetables in season."

Seniors who are 60 years of age or older who live in the City of Chester and the surrounding communities of Ashton, Chester Township, Edystone, Marcus Hook, Parkside, Trainer, Upland, and Lower and Upper Chichester are eligible to participate.

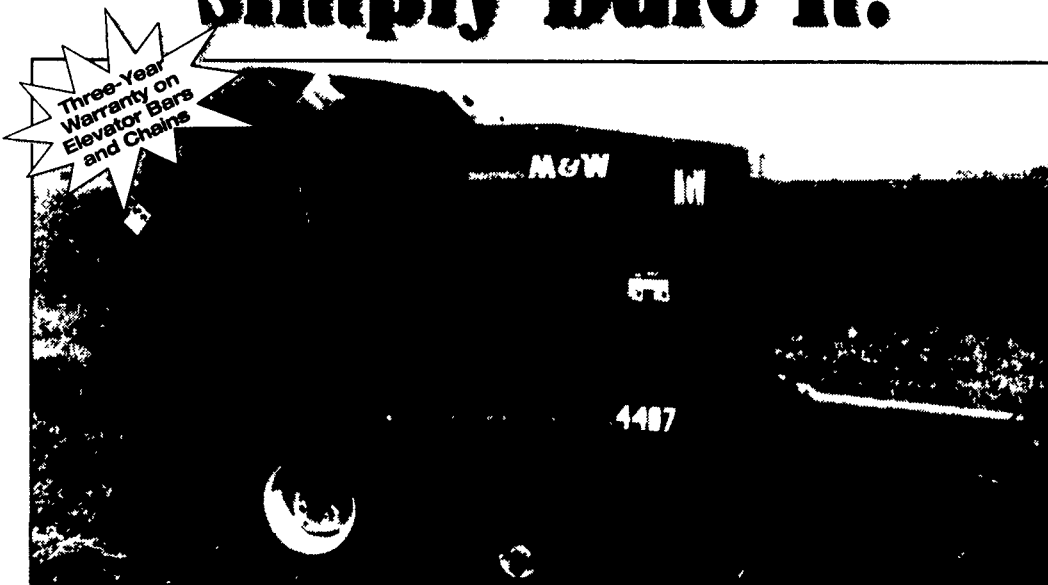
The following markets will accept the Farmers Market Nutrition program checks: Chester Community Farmers Market, at the Trinity United Methodist Church parking lot, Ninth and Kerlin Street, Chester, open noon to 4 p.m. every Thursday; and Linvilla Orchards Farm Market, 137 West Knowlton Road, Media, open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

The Rockview State Correctional Institution's farm operation also will supply an additional farmers market site — location and hours to be announced — with fresh fruits and vegetables. The checks will be accepted only at these markets.

The \$5 checks are available to Chester Senior Center members at 721 Hayes St., Chester. Non-Chester Senior Center member, living in the City of Chester and surrounding eligible communities, may pick up checks on Wednesdays, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., at the Chester Senior Center.

For more information on this new pilot program, contact the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Food Distribution at 1-800-468-2433.

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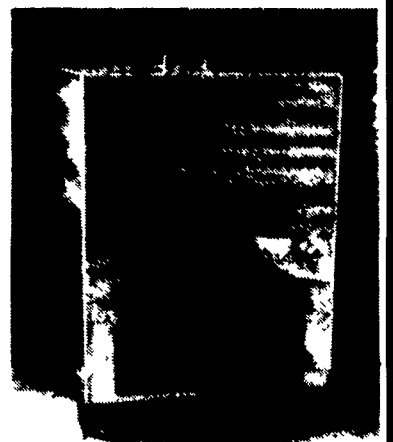
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