

Ag Progress Adds Several New Demonstrations

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.
Lancaster Farming Staff
ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — Several new displays were made this week during Penn State University's College of Agricultural Science's annual Ag Progress Days, held at the College's 1,500-acre research farm in Rockspring, a short distance from State College.

The Ralph E. Larson Research Farm, donated by the owner, is part of the research acreage, and has been the site of the Ag Progress Days event for a number of years.

The research site maintains the original barn, farmhouse and corn crib, although they are used for offices, grounds maintenance and equipment storage during most of the year.

Once a year they become the headquarters, research tour bus departure site and media center for the throngs of visitors who come to see the latest in technological advances and research findings from the College of Agricultural Sciences.

A several-acre tent and permanent building mini-city has evolved out from the farmhouse to serve as temporary home for representatives of various commercial agricultural equipment, machinery and related industries.

State agencies, such as the state Department of Agriculture, also have maintained display space during Ag Progress Days, as well

as sub-agencies, such as its Bureau of Weights and Measures.

While change can seem to happen slowly at the Ag Progress Days event for those who visit year-after-year, organizers have been aware of the need to prevent display from becoming static and boring.

Especially in the past 10 years the event has grown in its outreach, appealing to various audiences, such as youth as well as to those in emerging agricultural production enterprises.

Available are experts and information on various issues, not only the latest findings applicable to pesticide applications, manure handling, composting, soil tillage, seeding, harvesting, storage and general farm safety.

This year, the state Department of Agriculture expanded its display to become more aggressive in attracting an audience to hear its message of promoting markets and uses of the state's agricultural commodities and products.

A large canvas wall tent was erected this year with displays and a stage.

Along the back wall of the tent was the stage, and the stage backdrop was a large display of PDA's new logo, unveiled Wednesday by state Gov. Tom Ridge.

The new logo is to be used for everything concerning the department, according to state Agriculture Secretary Samuel Hayes Jr.

In addition to serving for a logo-unveiling ceremony, the PDA stage was used by young country singing sensation Crystal Marie, a now-12-year-old rural Pennsylvania girl who started performing close to home at fairs, and in the past year or more, has been performing statewide. Using taped accompaniment, she performed at the Farm Show, at the first PDA Farm-City activity day at the PDA Building in Harrisburg, and at many fairs this year across the state.

Hayes said that for the department to promote the state's agricultural products, it can't afford to be timid in grabbing the attention of the public and consumers. Crystal Marie seemed to prove her worth during performances Tuesday in attracting a crowd to the new PDA tent.

Another wall of the new PDA Ag Progress tent (the entire wall in fact) was adorned with the department's new logo to promote the consumption of Pennsylvania-raised produce: "Pennsylvania Produce, Simply Delicious."

That new logo was unveiled recently by the department and is now on many billboards at strategic locations in the state.

Another new display was the College's Animal Science's "greenhouse" facility, which provided an educational showcase for modern livestock production technology. A cow was on display



One of several displays of diseased plants and possible causes of symptoms is next to a video player running an educational tape on plant insects produced by Penn State, "Insects and Spiders and Mites, Oh My!" It is for sale through the College of Agricultural Sciences. Help locating a copy should be available through a local Penn State Cooperative Extension office.



In the new greenhouse facility, Tom Doman, on the right, with Penn State University, talks about irradiation to a visitor to Ag Progress Days.



The experts answer questions from Ag Progress Days visitors on plant pathology and other growing problems, involving fertility, predation, infections, and more.

inside the greenhouse, lined with displays involving such topics as irradiation of meats, Johne's Disease, etc.

Experts were also on hand to provide answers on dairy and swine production, as well as other related topics.

A cut flower demonstration plot was on display for the first time, highlight various cut flower species and varieties, highlighting the College's role in helping to test variety performance, raising techniques and disease prevention.

In another unveiling, the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau held a ceremony to formally recognize its permanent structure in the Ag Progress Days city, replacing a tent structure that the PFB has long used.

The existing booths and display tents continued to be popular with the visitors, especially the "Ask The Experts" tent, a coordinated effort where entomologists and plant experts were on hand to answer questions one-to-one with visitors.

While the experts sat facing in at a long table along one wall of the tent, the other walls of the tent had actual displays of diseased plants and laminated cards listing the possible causes of the symptoms.

Also on display was a video tape prepared by the College on plant insects (beneficials and problem causers), identifications, activities, and problems and potential solutions.

The three-day Ag Progress Days event also offered a variety of research tours involving some continuing tours into demonstration projects involving manure handling, composting, and wetlands and stream corridor management, forest stewardship, etc.

While some of those tours have not changed name or topic over the years, they are always updated with some new information and findings.

The general research tour offered every year provides an overview of the grounds and the activities taking place.

While the bus for the general tour didn't make any stops on its circuit through the research grounds, the taped recording that was coordinated with the bus ride not only discussed the various types of ongoing and new research on the grounds, but several times the mention of the nutrient "phosphorus" was made in respect to conservation and efficiency considerations with tillage, global information system (GIS) technology.

(GIS research at Penn State was introduced at last year's Ag Progress Days. Then it was primarily concerned with soil fertility mapping and was tractor-mounted for use in planting, fertilizing and harvesting. It was mentioned during the general research tour as a possible backpack technology to be used during field scouting for pests in order to conduct precision pesticide applications.)

Out of the 1,500 acres of agricultural land included in the Rockspring area, only about 50 acres are suitable for small plot research. However, just about every square foot is targeted for some kind of ongoing research, and even those fields not currently serving as host of an ongoing project, in many cases are also studied for other concerns, such as weed control, soil nutrient movement and depletion compared to crop species, etc.

From small fruits to tree fruits, potatoes and tomatoes and early and late blight, training systems for traditional tressed plants and for non-traditional plants (such as apples, the Penn State apple hedgerow system, for example), the research plots contain a variety of different study projects.