

Adams County Has A Number Of Farmers Who Are Young

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GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.) — Ed Wilkinson, 32, president of Adams County Farm Bureau, stands along side the dairy barn on one of Getty Acres' farms in Adams County waiting for his brother Dan Wilkinson and brother-in-law Chris Smith to arrive.

He is mulling over the question "Why did you stay on the farm?" The others will soon arrive to join the conversation.

It's a question asked because David Kann Jr. of the Adams County Conservation District, who has worked in York and Adams counties, said he sees far more young men staying with farming in Adams County than he saw in York County.

The Wilkinson brothers and Smith say for one thing they find the work rewarding and they don't have to punch a clock.

And another young Adams County farmer, 22-year-old Brian Reaver first found out what it was like to work off of the farm, but when the need arose on the farms of his grandfather Henry Reaver, he came back to lend a hand. "I couldn't see it go out of the family and I'm not sorry I came back. I'm going to keep at it. I grew up on it," Brian said.

But, Brian cautions, a young person just getting into farm should know that "they've got to be dedicated to work. You just can't get up and go."

While Kann does not have specific statistics on how the two counties compare he notes that he can quickly count 15 or so young men in Adams County who have chosen farming as a career. In the years he was in York County, he could not report the same thing.

Kann believes some of the reasons farming attracts the younger generation in Adams County is the fact that land rent is much cheaper.

"I spoke with several farmers last week who said they are renting ground for \$20 and \$40 an acre. But you go to York County you're being charged \$80 and \$100 and in some cases \$120 . . . that's rough for a farmer who's been paying \$80 or \$90 an acre and somebody comes in and stiffes them by saying 'Mr Landowner, I can give you \$120 per acre,'" he said.

The rejection is difficult for the farmer to take, but on the other hand, Kann said, you can't blame the landowner "because he's just looking for enough money to pay the taxes"

The cheap land rent "entices younger guys to afford to get into farming," Kann believes. They can stake out 40 or 50 acres and use the equipment already on a relative's farm. "They can start out small," he said.

Kann further explains that land rent is cheap because soil is poorer in Adams County than in York County.

"You're not going to get your yields like Southern York County of 150 to 200 bushels of corn. Oh, there are pockets, don't get me wrong, but most of the time you're going to get 90 to 100 bushel an acre and if you're only paying \$40 an acre rent there's some money to be made," he said.

Ed Wilkinson said land leased in his operation is reason-

able "simply because the landlord doesn't want to see development or it can't be developed because of perc tests. Those are the two things keeping development in check around here (Getty Acres) is it's hard to get a perc test and if they do get one it's on such a big acreage that a lot of people looking for the small lot don't fool with it."

Further, knowing that the yields will not be as great, Adams County farmers tend to diversify, Kann explained. While York County farmers can survive on "corn, soybeans, corn, soybeans," Kann said, noting that livestock is leaving the York County.

"York County is focused on crop production, strictly crop production," he continued. This also accounts for the increase in custom harvesting, where the owner of large pieces of equipment come to a farm and harvest a crop, and adds to the farmer's profits. They do not need to buy a \$125,000 combine, for example, and maintain it while using it only once or twice a year, he explained.

In fact the Wilkinson brothers, while today they limit the amount of custom harvesting they do, have provided this practice for Adams County farmers in the past. Kann said it seems, because Adams County is smaller, to be easier to find someone to custom harvest.

Kann also believes the fact that Adams County remains mostly rural with less commercialism there is not the draw on a young person to go into another business.

In Adams County, "You still have that kid tie to agricultural," he said.

And that tie is supported through the six Adams County school districts where a vocational-agricultural course is offered in each.

Kann said, "Vo-ag's come a long way to attract more students. It's not just cows and plows anymore. It's more sophisticated, computerized management of farms."

All of the young farmers interviewed had graduated from the vo-ag course in their respective school districts.

"I don't think you can put your finger on any one thing and say that is why young men stay in farming in Adams County, because there are several reasons why," he said.

For Ed Wilkinson, it's been the work in 4-H and FFA "that prompts you to stick closer" and stay involved in the farm.

Just out of high school "I guess I had in my head I was going to farm because I didn't know what else was out there. Since then I've gotten CDLs to run the tractor trailers and a lot of options have opened up. You're not doing the exact same thing every day. I guess I wouldn't have stayed if I had to milk cows," Ed said.

It's important for the young person on the farm to be able to challenge themselves, he said. "I think that's why a lot of young guys look elsewhere, if the opportunity isn't there for them to challenge themselves and grow, they'll look to an occupation that gives them that challenge," he said.

For Dan Wilkerson, 30, working on the farm ever since he can remember anything "makes it



Young farmers who help to operate Getty Acres are from left, Dan Wilkerson, Chris Smith, and Ed Wilkinson. The farm, located near Gettysburg, was started by their father Larry Wilkerson.

just sort of stick with you."

"Here I can see a chance to take over something that dad (Larry Wilkerson) has started and put a lot of hard work and effort into. In high school I started buying equipment and leasing it to dad. When we went into the partnership with dad all that came along," Dan said.

Here Ed interjects "a lot of the credit's got to go to dad, he gave us room and both of us had equipment that he leased from us."

The brothers note that many times young farmers run into struggles with the elders in the family because there's not enough room given for new methods. And they too had to follow their father's directions when they were working on their father's farm, but when they wanted to try to do something in a different way they'd go onto their own ground "and did it our way."



Brian Reaver, 22, left the farm but came back to it because he didn't want to see it leave his family. His grandfather Henry Reaver began operating the farm in the 1940s. David Kann Jr., Adams County Chesapeake Bay Nutrient Management Technician, right, talks with Brian while a shy calf tries to hide.



Young Farmers Host Educational Program

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — A two-day educational event featuring pesticide application, a dairy nutritional program, and a corn silage harvest equipment demonstration is scheduled for Nov. 16-17 in the Lebanon County area.

The event will begin at Zimmerman Farm Services, School Road, Bethel, on Tuesday, Nov. 16, from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Brubaker's Agronomics will present programs for pesticide credits. Miller Pro will have equipment to test nozzles (bring them along).

On Wednesday, Nov. 17, activities will begin at 10 a.m. at Tom and Shirley Krall's farm, two miles west of Schaefferstown on

Rt. 419.

A field equipment demonstration will be held from 10 to noon. The following equipment will be demonstrated in harvesting an 8-acre corn silage field:

- Class 840 forage harvester
- Gehl CB1275 harvester with crop processor
- New Holland FX25 harvester with roller mill
- Miller Pro forage wagon
- Gehl 980 forage wagon
- Miller Pro blower
- 2 Ford/New Holland tractors, Genesis 8670 and 7740.

After lunch, the dairy nutrition program will be held from 12:45 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tim Lehman,

Agway nutritionist, will talk about maximizing butterfat, rumen health, and milk production. Carl and Dan Brandt, who have the highest butterfat herd in Lebanon County, will also be sharing.

For more information and reservations, call Tom Krall (717) 274-5891 or Zimmerman Farm Service (717) 933-4114 or Tulpehocken High School (717) 933-4114.

Tulpehocken Adult Young Farmers and Miller Pro is hosting the event held at Zimmerman Farm Service. Cedar Crest Young Farmers is hosting the event at the Krall farm.