

## Lebanon Conservation District Praises Wengert's Dairy

**VERNON ACHENBACH JR.**  
Lancaster Farming Staff  
MT GRETNA (Lebanon Co.) — The Lebanon County Conservation District last week recognized outstanding efforts by individuals and businesses in the southeastern Pennsylvania county for work done to conserve natural resources.

During its annual meeting and awards recognition event, held at the Timbers Restaurant in Mt. Gretna, District Director Charles Wertz and District Naturalist/Forester Leigh Beamesderfer reviewed district activities and accomplishments for the past year.

In the actual awards presentations, members of the district board of directors presented the awards, in some cases accompanied by a slide presentation of some of the activities.

A local dairy business, an Annville couple, a Union Canal Elementary School teacher, a South Londonderry Township landowner, and two special volunteers were recognized.

### Clean Water Farm Award

Wengert's Dairy, a 67-year-old family dairy business (recently sold to the national Illinois-based Deans Foods Corp., but with retained local leadership and identity), was recognized with the district's Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Farm Award.

The award was made to John B. Wengert, president, in recognition of Wengert's Dairy's fencing 8,000 linear feet of streambank from cattle, planting streambank shade and erosion control trees, and constructing two cattle crossings along the Snitz Creek.

The creek bisects the 241 acres of farmland surrounding the dairy plant, located near the city of Lebanon.

Wengert's Dairy has long been recognized within the dairy regulatory industry and among consumers, as achieving the highest quality dairy products.

Wengert's (also produces the Graybill's line of products) contracts the production of more than 3 million pounds of milk per week from 71 dairy farms in Lebanon County and northern Lancaster County.

Tenant farmers of the land sur-

rounding Wengert's plant, Dave Bomberger and Paul Miller, use a conservation plan revised in 1995 by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The plan includes a conservation cropping sequence, conservation tillage, and stripcropping. A herd of 40 heifers are pastured along the Snitz Creek.

Late last year, Wengert's completed the streambank fencing and cattle crossings through a state Department of Environmental Protection program.

The project is important for several reasons, not the least being the impacts to the Snitz Creek from upstream activities.

The Snitz Creek has been a stocked trout stream for years. It used to carry an evident resident population of wild and carryover brown trout and it had several miles opened for public fishing and stocking by the state and local groups.

For many years, between Wengert's Dairy and its Cornwall Mines headwaters, the lower section of the stream had run through several dairy farms that didn't use streambank fencing.

The lower cattle stocking densities of those years, and the more or less stable flow of the stream — characteristic of streams that receive significant contributions of flow from limestone springs — even during storm events, helped prevent severe erosion of banks and the suffocating sedimentation of its pools, even with a lack of cattle fencing.

But, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, residential development on the stream's upper floodplain was done without any stream-protecting stormwater controls, or with protests coming too late to matter.

In the upper reaches of the stream during those years, and to some extent since, residential land developers canalized and dredged the streambed, as well as removed sections of streambank, and constructed flood diversion dikes, in an effort to improve and accelerate flood-plain drainage.

In addition to those activities, mostly designed to gain percolation testing for home building, there had been some filling-in of spring seeps and wetlands as well, again in some cases to gain housing lots.



Dr. Timothy Trayer and family are recognized as the Lebanon County District Landowners of the Year. From the left, Jeffrey Steckbeck presents the award to Dr. Timothy, son Troy, Debra, and daughter Amy Trayer.

All of that flood plain activity has further added to the stormwater loading of the stream, increasing the likelihood of damage to unprotected streambanks along the lower reaches.

In all, the stream's condition has deteriorated significantly since the early 1970s.

While fewer of the farms upstream are without bank protection, fewer farms exist.

The work done at Wengert's — with 12 feet setback from the stream on both sides, along with the planting of gum, willow, and red maple trees — has apparently already begun to stabilize the streambanks and improve conditions for aquatic and riparian wildlife.

In addition, the work has added tremendously to the natural beautification of the Wengert's Dairy site, increasingly surrounded by residential development.

Third generation president of the dairy, John B. Wengert, manages the dairy with the same high standard that his grandfather Samuel K. Wengert once did, according to Connie Hoffer, a district board director, who with husband Gerald, recently entered their owned South Annville Township farm into farmland preservation.

The award was presented to Wengert's Dairy by Connie Hoffer.

The recipient, John B. Wengert, also has established in many ways, that he realizes the importance of preserving farmland and open-space, according to Hoffer. He is actively involved in the local "Rail-to-Trails" endeavor.

"A drive by Wengert's Dairy on Walnut Street exemplifies how industry, agriculture and the environment can co-exist in harmony," Hoffer said.

### Conservationists Of The Year

David and Ann Lasky of Annville were named the county district's Conservationist(s) of the Year.

Betty Conner, also a Conservation District director, as well as involved with several other county and area conservation and educational programs, presented the award to the Laskys.

Both of the Laskys have been intimately involved in organizing and carrying out efforts to improve the environmental and recreational conditions and quality of the Lebanon County area.

Work done by both involves watershed protections and



From the left, Betty Conner, Lebanon Conservation District board member, presents the district's Conservationist of the Year award to David and Ann Lasky.

improvements for the Swatara Creek and the Quittapahilla Creek.

The Swatara Creek Watershed comprises the bulk of Lebanon County, and the Swatara Creek is the larger stream that empties directly into the Susquehanna River.

The Quittapahilla Creek is a tributary to the Swatara, and the main draining stream for the city of Lebanon, and the municipalities of West Lebanon, Cleona, and Annville.

Other streams of concern which drain contiguous, highly residential municipalities, are tributaries to the Quittapahilla.

Most of the aquifers and some adjoining land along the limestone spring-supplied streams in Lebanon County have a long history of being mined for limestone — for homes, barns, road and drainage fill materials, mix for concrete and for soil amendment.

While the historically wealthy leaders of Lebanon County saw fit to make considerable donations of land for public parks (Coleman's Park, etc.), when those wealthy families lost control of their operations to global corporations, such public lands support began to dwindle.

In the meantime, the county's ratio of public land to public began to dwindle.

Furthermore, locally elected leadership expressed little real commitment or desire to maintaining public lands. Instead that leadership has over the years moved to sell much of its public lands, especially some watershed lands, in order to temporarily achieve lower

tax rates, or temporarily effect no tax increases.

As a result, through attrition of public open space, formerly undesirable areas have represented mostly last chance opportunities to regain some public lands for passive or individual recreation.

Such a formerly undesirable area is located in the Borough of Annville — a 23-acre abandoned limestone quarry operation that has become, through efforts, a recreational area — the Quittapahilla Creek Nature Park.

Locally known in abbreviated form as "The Quittie Creek Nature Park," the Laskys have been involved in its development and improvement, as well as being involved in the larger Swatara Creek Watershed Association (SCWA).

Ann Lasky has been co-chair of the Quittie Creek Park Committee since its inception in 1989.

She has helped to organize cleanups in the park, tree plantings, Earth Day walks, mulching of trails (with mulch provided by local tree trimmers), trail maintenance, and educational school programs.

The Quittapahilla Creek has suffered long-term abuses from being used as a sacrifice stream for the wastes and storm water from the Lebanon city population; it was greatly considered a dead or offensive stream because of the wastes supplied by the former Bethlehem Steel operations, Lebanon Steel and other foundries and steel-working industries, as well as other industrial and commercial

(Turn to Page A31)



From the left, Jo Ellen Litz, Lebanon County commissioner and district board member, presents the district's Educator of the Year award to Kathy Sattazahn.