

Farmland Preservationist Authors Book

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

MILLERSVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — Amos H. Funk, father of farmland preservation, is 87 years old. Although he walks a bit slowly and has a touch of angina, his mission to share his love for the land continues its steady pace.

Known as the champion of farmland preservation and conservation, Funk has recently authored the book, "My Life and Love for the Land."

In the 282-page hardcover book published by Masthof Press, Morgantown, Funk tells how his life was shaped to become an avid champion of farmland preservation.

He said that his passion for caring for the land was birthed when as a 12-year-old, he accepted Christ as savior. Commitment, he believed, was to turn over to the Lord the best of his ability, his time, and energy. His Sunday school teacher taught him that one should not destroy or waste God's creation.

As a young boy, Amos looked around the farm and noticed some serious erosion on several fields. He didn't know what to do about the soil loss until he met a neighbor who worked for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service. For the first time, Amos learned that by changing field shapes and farming across the slopes of the hill in alternate strips of cultivated and non-cultivated crops, erosion could be reduced.

When Amos asked his dad to try contour farming, his dad replied: "I will never get used to or like those crooked rows. However, you probably will be farming long after I am gone, and if you think it is a good idea, let's try it."

They did. They also turned a small chicken house into a roadside stand because Amos wanted to try it. That small beginning grew to include acreage from three farms, 22 greenhouses, a store with more than \$2 million in sales, which employs 150 people during its peak season.

Because of Funk's enthusiasm for conservation, he was later asked to serve on the newly formed board of the Lancaster County Conservation District.

"At first we were concerned about soil erosion, but in the late 1960s, we developed a new concern. We became concerned about the loss of entire farms or parts of farms when they were taken out of production for industrial or residential development."

It became Funk's passion to do everything he could to convince people of the need to save the state's farmland.

He helped form Farmland Trust and the Friends of Agricultural Land Preservation. He solicited funds, introduced legislation to change laws, and testified before the Ag Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

He tangled with land developers, board of realtors, and with fellow farmers who saw Funk's proposals as a threat to free enterprise and the right to do what they wanted with the land, believing it would cut the value of their property.

Funk, who himself owned three farms, said, "If we believe that we

are ever going to permanently preserve farmland in the county, farmers will have to somewhat reduce their anticipated equity they feel they have in the land, and the public will have to use tax dollars to provide an incentive for the farmer to make a commitment to permanently keep the farm in agriculture. Government at all levels will have to provide additional incentives to farm without a lot of governmental regulations."

Funk fought and won to have the Internal Revenue Service treat donated deed restrictions to the county and ag preservation as deductions from Federal income tax.

Funk himself placed a deed restriction on his 89-acre farm.

The book details both problems and successes in saving the best farmland in the county.

"This is a permanent record that demonstrates that most worthwhile things are not easy to attain," Funk said as he held up a copy of his book. "I wrote this to share ideas, not to make money."

Funk said that it was hard to get preservation moving. "In the beginning, we were knocked down in Harrisburg because the issue was considered too controversial."

Patience, Funk said, is not one of his virtues. When he attended a hearing held by the Pennsylvania House Ag committee on farmland preservation, Funk said, "We have talked and talked. For more than 20 years we have talked about farmland preservation in Pennsylvania. It is time to do something!"

Today Funk can look back over his life with the satisfaction that the county is considered a national leader in farmland preservation and has preserved 350 farms.

He believes that part of the reason that land preservation became so successful in the county was that the board pushed for guided growth rather the preservation of every farm.

One of the reasons that builders have not fought the deed restriction program was because it is voluntary and has a 25-year limit. In addition, a builder and developer sat on the board and acted as a watchdog for the industry.

Friends and foes see Funk as extremely honest. A man of tireless dedication, Funk is also an excellent farmer who was named a 1966 Master Farmer.

Funk refused honorary fees despite averaging more than 1,000 hours annually speaking locally and nationally on behalf of preservation.

When Funk was absent from one of the Lancaster Farmland Trust meetings, board members set up the Amos Funk Farmland Endowment Trust. It started with \$1,000 gift and now has more than \$650,000 funded by people interested in farmland preservation.

Of special interest to growers is the book's account of how the successful Funk's Farm Market selected crops. Also of interest are changes needing to be made to avoid a loss in profits.

Funk writes of how varieties of sweet corn, strawberries, and other produce was improved throughout his years as a grower.

When comparing today's varieties with those of the past, Funk looks at a tomato and remarks:



Amos H. Funk and his wife Esta hold a copy of the newly released "My Life and Love for the Land." Funk, often referred to as the "father of farmland preservation," has received state and national awards for his preservation and conservation work. Funk wrote the book to inspire others to treasure prime farmland and retain it for future generations. The book also tells of his family, the roadside stand that grew to include 22 greenhouses and acreage from three farms to provide fresh produce.

"You've come a long way, baby, —regardless of what anyone says about hard tomatoes and hard times."

A plant pathologist named a raspberry "Amos" after Funk. According to Funk the variety is five days earlier than other varieties, the berries are larger and are equal in taste to the other leading berry. In addition, the Amos variety reduces labor costs more than \$100 per acre because it sends out half as many suckers.

Funk has spent the past year compiling the book. Now that he is finished, he said that he plans to "coast" a bit.

What Funk calls coasting is different than many probably forsee themselves doing as 87-year-olds.

Funk plans to continue to help out with the Farm Market, which his son Fred has taken over. "I like to help with the planting and fertilizing operation, which is determined with soil tests and record keeping," Funk said. "I draw up the projected plans and my son goes over them."

As always, Funk is in the search for a better raspberry and a better tomato. Sensors are inserted in the ground to maintain irrigation levels. It's exciting for him to find that the optimal taste of cantaloupe can be increased by keeping a cantaloupe on the vine longer if the

right water levels can be maintained.

Funk said that he has led a satisfying life. He is profuse in the praise of his wife Esta, who he said gets the credit for how well their six children have turned out and for everything that he was able to accomplish. The couple has 11 grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Funk said that he reads the Bible a lot. He likes sports, especially the Eagles, "when they were a better

team." He is a Penn State fan.

He wants to continue living in the farmhouse where he was born, and his father before him.

"No one likes farming better than I do," Funk said. "It's a challenge that isn't found as much in other areas. I've always been drawn to things that are difficult."

The book is available at local bookstores, and from the publisher, Masthof Press, 220 Mill Rd., Morgantown, PA 19543. Or call Masthof at (610) 286-0258.

Cook's Notes

- To quickly mince an onion, peel and quarter it. Place the sections in a blender and cover with cold water. Turn the blender on high for about 3 seconds, then turn it off. Repeat until the onions are blended. Pour the mixture into a sieve and let the water drain out.

- For cookies that are rolled in sugar, place five or six balls of

dough at a time in a container of sugar, cover and shake to coat. It saves time and your fingers stay clean.

- A small funnel is handy for separating egg whites from the yolks. Break the egg over the funnel. The whites will run through the funnel and the yolk will remain.



Where's your mustache?™