

USDA Promotes Environment-Friendly Milk Production

WASHINGTON, D.C.— In an effort to encourage more environmentally friendly dairy production, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has provided financial assistance and technical support to a creative group of Pennsylvania farmers.

The farmers are part of a new campaign launched this week to establish a premium Environmental Quality Initiative milk label. Consumers who purchase the specially labeled milk called, *Chesapeake Milk™*, will directly support farmers' efforts to prevent

pollution from animal waste and other sources.

"We have contributed funding and expertise since 1991 to help Pennsylvania dairy farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed adopt sound conservation and management practices," said Colien Heferan, acting administrator for USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. "These efforts have effectively reduced nutrient runoff into streams and other bodies of water that feed the Bay, improving water quality."

Farmers have fenced stream-side riparian areas to keep cattle out, built manure storage facilities to hold animal waste until it can be spread on fields for fertilizer, and controlled runoff from roofs and across barnyard areas.

Fresh Fields, a chain of grocery markets in the mid-Atlantic region, will test market the environmentally labeled milk for one year beginning this week. For every half-gallon sold, 2½ cents will be returned to the certified Pennsylvania dairy farmers to reward their high environmental standards.

Another 2½ cents will be deposited into an Environmental Quality Initiative which will provide cost-share for those farmers who want to install conservation practices to qualify for the EQI program.

"Farmers have always worked to protect the resources from which they make their living," said Danny Sells, associate chief for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. "This marketing effort brings the food producer, the retailer, and the consumer together to benefit the en-

vironment."

USDA developed the environmental stewardship standards used to certify a farm for participation in the EQI label program. It worked through the Cooperative Extension Service at Pennsylvania State University to develop a scorecard for the farmstead evaluation.

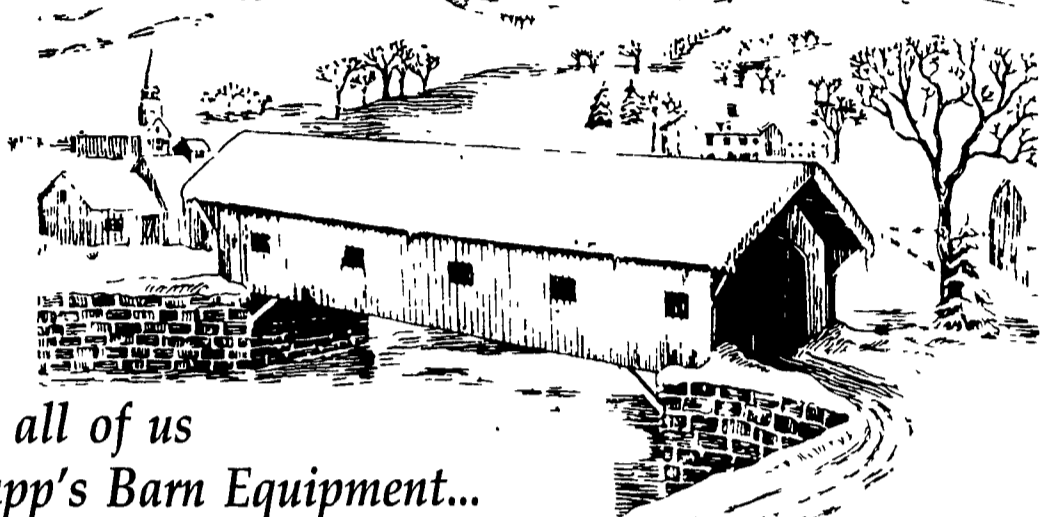
Twenty farms in southeastern Pennsylvania are currently certified to participate in the EQI labeling program. The Roman Stoltzfoos and Mahlon Lapp Farms in Lancaster County have served as demonstration farms for the project and have hosted tours to provide other farmers with the knowledge of how the conservation practices affect the land and their business.

Since 1995, both USDA agencies have worked with the Dairy Network Partnership of environmental and educational organizations to develop the EQI.

The Dairy Network Partnership is a collaboration of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension, Rodale Institute, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in cooperation with Sunnysdale Farms and Natural Dairy Products Corporation.

Local conservation districts also provide cost-share monies for installing conservation measures through the Chesapeake Bay Program. Practices have been installed on many farms through partnerships of local organizations and state and Federal agencies, local conservation districts, Trout Unlimited, and local sportsman's organizations.

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