

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — When it comes to utility bills, it's just human nature to pay the charge and not think about it again until next month. In the new era of deregulated electricity suppliers, however, consumers should be very savvy shoppers, according to an expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Deregulation of electricity generation means that customers can choose the company responsible for generating the electricity they use," said Dennis Buffington, professor of agricultural and biological engineering. "Each customer's local utility still is responsible for transmitting and distributing power to homes."

Power generation companies currently are marketing services across Pennsylvania, asking consumers to enroll in a program to choose electricity suppliers. Once enrolled, consumers will receive a list of licensed suppliers interested in selling electricity in their area.

"Residential customers should know whether the prices listed by

suppliers are just for generation, or whether transmission of power is included within that price," Buffington said.

All consumers — both commercial and residential — should get understandable answers to questions concerning:

- Price. Be sure the price you pay per kilowatt-hour is listed.

- Rates. Are there special peak and off-peak rates? Find out what the time periods are for the special rates.

- Fees. Customers should determine if the supplier includes a monthly service charge, a minimum monthly charge or a membership fee.

- Billing. Make sure you know the supplier's policy on what services you will be billed for. "Most people don't want to pay two utility bills," Buffington said. "Be aware of how your utilities will be billed, and whether you can pay your bill by electronically transferring funds."

- Budget Billing. Many consumers pay a pro-rated monthly fee that reflects electrical usage

throughout an entire year, avoiding huge single-month bills. Some suppliers may not offer a budgeting service.

- Contracts. Find out the exact length of the contract. Ask the supplier to detail what charges or other penalties are billed to the consumer if you break the contract.

- Other Services. Electricity suppliers can offer additional services, such as heating oil, natural gas and equipment maintenance.

Buffington says consumers in some areas of Pennsylvania may not find many electricity suppliers competing for their residential business. "Some suppliers may be concentrating on capturing a large share of the industrial and commercial market before concentrating on residential users," Buffington explains. "Other suppliers may decide that profit margins in the residential market are too small for them to compete aggressively."

More suppliers will concentrate on residential markets over the coming year. He recommends that consumers call avail-

able suppliers frequently to remain updated on service rates and special offers.

"New suppliers are always entering the market, and some suppliers find they can't compete and drop out of the market," Buffington said. "It pays to keep yourself updated on who the players are in

the marketplace."

Consumers can see up-to-date lists of electricity suppliers for all areas of the state at the Website: <http://www.electrichoice.com>, or by contacting the Penn State Cooperative Extension office in your county.

## Get Rid Of Moss

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Moss is one of the most persistent and annoying weeds that occurs in home lawns, but you can control it, says a Penn State turfgrass scientist.

"Moss is an opportunistic plant that grows in bare soil where grass is weak and thin," said Peter Landschoot, associate professor of turfgrass science. "Once moss has invaded the lawn, grass won't spread into those areas."

Attempts to get rid of moss are rarely effective unless a dense, active growing turf can take its place, he said.

To control moss, you have to

consider the reasons why it began to grow in your lawn. Moss usually thrives under conditions that aren't conducive to good turf growth, such as poor soil fertility, acid soil, heavy shade, excessive moisture or shallow, rocky soils.

The first step in controlling moss is to test the soil for nutrient content and pH. Soil test kits are available from the Penn State Cooperative Extension office for a nominal fee.

If the soil is deficient in nutrients or needs lime, the soil test report will indicate how much fertilizer and lime to apply and when to apply them. Over time, improved soil conditions will help soil conditions will help your grass compete with the moss."

If shade or moisture limit good turf growth, steps can be taken to correct the situation. For example, remove some trees or tree branches to increase sunlight and air circulation, or plant grasses or other ground covers that are adapted to shady or moist areas.

Attempt to eliminate moss with chemicals only after the limiting factors for good turf growth have been corrected. Unfortunately, there are only a few chemicals available for use on lawns.

"These products typically contain salts that will dehydrate or 'burn' the moss," said Landschoot. "But they also can burn desirable turfgrasses if used improperly, so be sure to follow the directions on the label." Remember, he said, it took a long time for the moss to become established, so it will take a long time to control it.

## Winding Up Not Down To Mid-Life

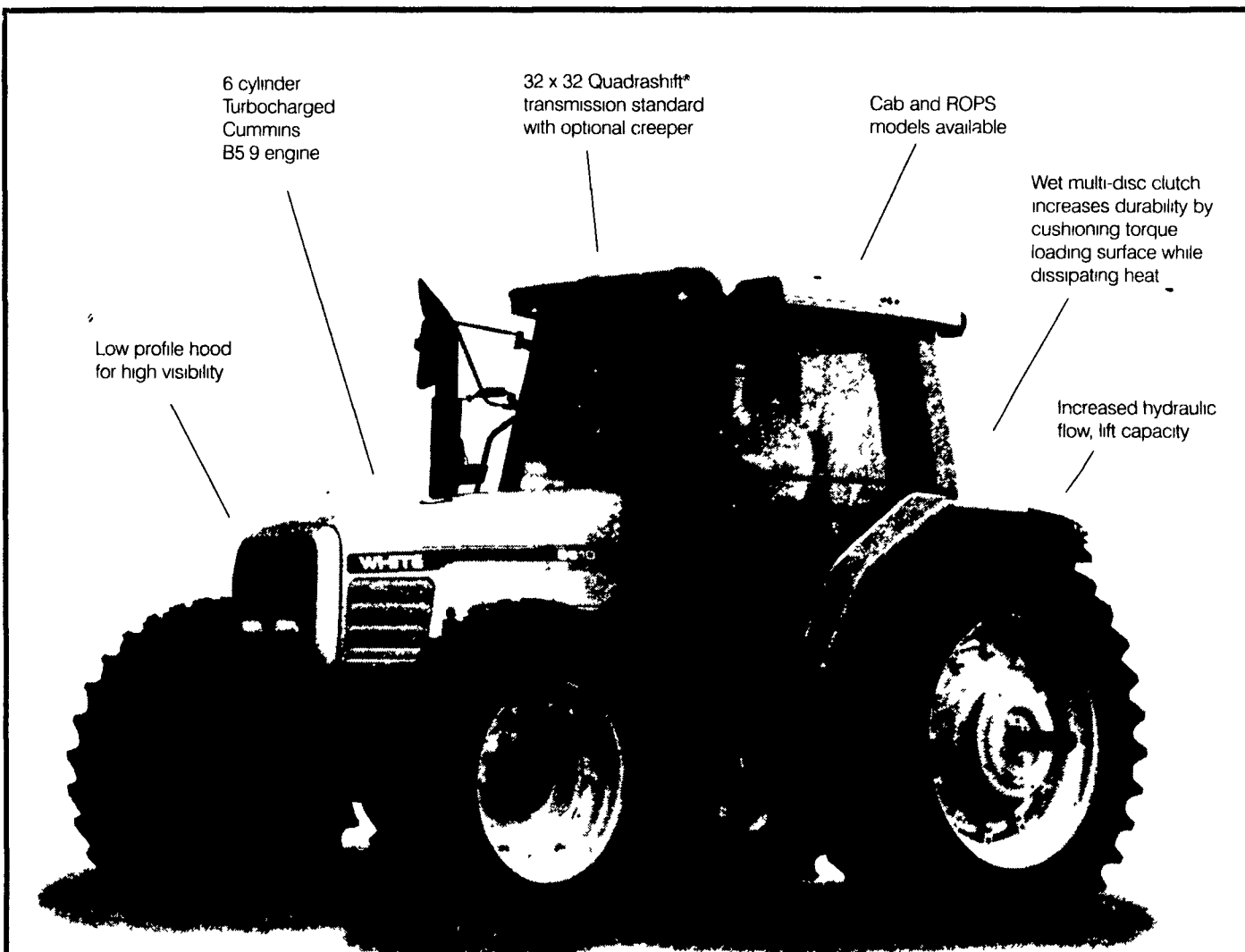
FLEMINGTON, N.J. — This three-week course is developed to provide individuals age 40-60 an opportunity to examine key issues in the areas of personal development, interpersonal relations, health, nutrition and fitness, and financial management; learn skills to increase life satisfaction; and develop a plan for addressing the second half of their lives.

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- Session Two: Relationships, Goals and Options in Middle Adulthood: Will explore the quality of relationships with family, friends, co-workers and the community. Class will discuss positive communications, stress management, visioning and goal setting. This session is on May 11, from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

- Session Three: Healthy Living (Health, Diet and Exercise): Will explore the physical changes in mid-life as well as identifying your health risk factors. Discuss strategies for healthy eating habits and exercising for life. This session is on May 18, from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

The fee is \$3 per class or a fee of \$7 for all three classes. All classes will be held at the Rutgers Extension Center, Rt. 31, Flemington. Call (908) 788-1342 to register.



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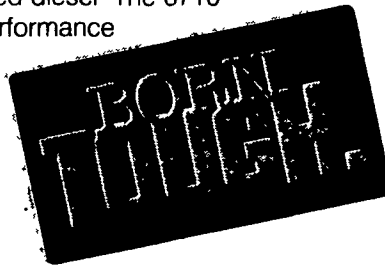
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