

# Brandywine Conservancy Preserves Farmland

CHADDS FORD (Delaware Co.) — Dick Breckbill has farming in his blood. Long before he could legally drive a car, he operated farm machinery to spread manure on his father's dairy farm in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Today, decades later, he recalls that first responsibility as a key initiation into farming.

Dick Breckbill is now gradually turning over the reins of Breck-A-Dee Farm located in Chester County to his three sons. Together, the four men tend to the family's 130 dairy cows and Breckbill's three grandchildren feed the calves, among other chores.

Farms such as Breck-A-Dee make Chester County the second most productive agricultural county in Pennsylvania behind Lancaster County. In addition to producing food and other products, agriculture contributes significantly to the state's economic infrastructure. Less apparent but equally important, agricultural land is open space, which provides environmental benefits such as recharging groundwater.

Between 1992 and 1997, however, more than 200,000 acres of Pennsylvania farmland, an area equivalent to half of Chester County, were lost to commercial and residential development. The explanations for this loss range from farmland's general flat and treeless topography, which, for developers, is the most sought-after ground, to high estate taxes which can inhibit the transfer of farmland to heirs.

Recognizing the need to save farmland, the Brandywine Conservancy established its Farmland Preservation Program in 1991. The program helps farmers continue farming by assisting them in protecting agricultural and natural lands, enrolling in preferential property tax assessment programs, and taking advantage of estate and income tax benefits available under existing federal and state legislation. Financial support from two private foundations currently enables the Conservancy to offer this assistance at no cost to farmers.

Since its formation, the program has been instrumental in

permanently protecting more than 3,000 acres of farmland. Working with individual farmers, Conservancy staff members prepare comprehensive plans that identify current land uses. These plans are then used to develop specific preservation strategies.

The protection of Breck-A-Dee Farm is a prime example of the Farmland Preservation Program in action. Beginning in 1993, Breckbill and the Conservancy investigated a variety of options to keep the farm in the family after Dick Breckbill's retirement.

Breck-A-Dee's flat, treeless topography and extensive frontage along roads made it a target for development. The value of Breckbill's farmland increased (although this increase was based on his farm's value as potential development land, not as agricultural land) and his property tax rose. Had nothing been done, his sons would have been hard pressed to pay the estate taxes on the assessed fair-market value.

Working with Conservancy staff, Breckbill significantly

reduced the appraised value of his farmland through a combination of agricultural and conservation easements. As a result, his property taxes declined. After initial consultations that determined how his land was utilized, Breckbill placed an agricultural easement on 130 acres through the sale of development rights to the Chester County Agricultural Land Preservation Board. The easement dictates that the land be used solely for agricultural purposes and restricts future commercial and residential development. The county's agricultural easements purchase program is funded in part by a

statewide tax cigarettes.

By selling his development rights, Breckbill incurred a capital gain tax. To offset that tax, Breckbill donated a conservation easement to the Conservancy on 40 acres of mature lowland forest and pasture-land that are the headwaters of Elk Creek. This environmentally significant land will be protected forever, contributing to a healthy stream and natural habitat for wildlife.

Since, 1967, the Brandywine Conservancy's Environmental Management Center has provided conservation solutions to landowners, farmers, municipalities, and developers.

## Land O'Lakes Urges USDA To Move Forward With Russian Pork Export

ARDEN HILLS,  
Minn. — Land O'Lakes  
called upon the USDA

to complete the process of purchasing 50,000 metric tons of pork as part of a long-delayed food aid package to Russia, and strongly urged the USDA to increase the program commitment to 100,000 metric tons.

Land O'Lakes outlined its position in a letter from Land O'Lakes President Jack Gherty to USDA Secretary Dan Glickman.

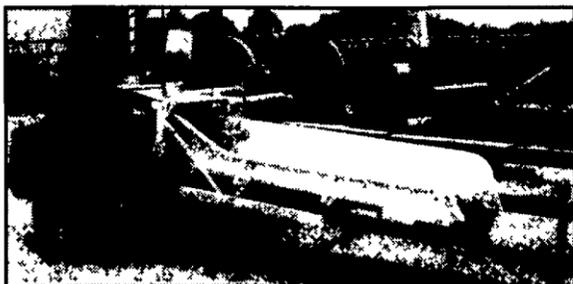
The food aid package was first announced more than nine months ago. Since that time, the USDA has issued and rejected two "tenders" or offers to purchase the product, while supplies of pork in cold storage have risen to a record level of more than a half-billion pounds. In his letter, Gherty said that the "price crisis facing U.S. hog producers makes it critical that the USDA move forward and even expand the Russian food aid pork purchase.

"The 50,000 metric ton purchase could remove close to 20 percent of the current supply in cold storage," Gherty wrote. "With the expectation of large hog numbers again this fall, it is critical the current tenders for purchase are completed, and these supplies are quickly removed from storage."

Gherty also indicated that Land O'Lakes supports the National Pork Producers Council in its call for the USDA to purchase an additional 50,000 metric tons of pork for delivery to Russia this fall and winter.

"A total purchase of 100,000 metric tons would make a significant reduction in cold storage supplies and be an important supportive factor for hog prices in the near-term," Gherty wrote.

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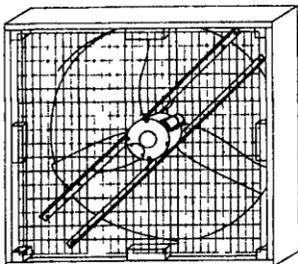
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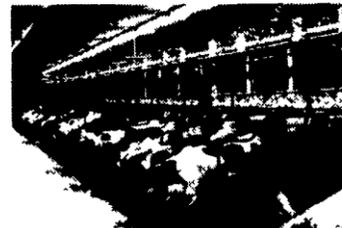
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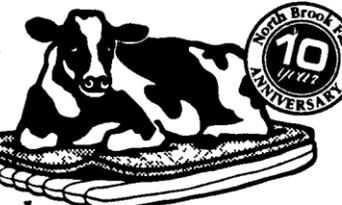
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