

Six Mid-Atlantic Farmers To Be Inducted As 2000 Master Farmers

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ers and their families will be recognized for their successes in areas: progressive business management, responsible use of resources and exemplary civic leadership.

The Master Farmer program is one of America's oldest and longest running agricultural honors programs, dating back to 1927. The award is co-sponsored by Pennsylvania Farmer and Maryland Farmer magazines and the cooperative extension programs of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and West Virginia.

"It's the 'Academy Awards of Agriculture,' said John Vogel, editor-in-chief of Pennsylvania Farmer and Maryland Farmer magazines. "Following standards established more than seven decades ago, it recognizes outstanding management, land stewardship and community role models. Our society very much needs such exemplary people who can be inspirations to others.

"This year's winners join the best of Mid-Atlantic agriculture. Mid-Atlantic Master Farmers comprise only 0.9% of all farmers in the five states," adds Vogel. "From their ranks have come a number of state and national ag leaders and several state agricultural secretaries."

For year 2000, more than 200 people from the five states were nominated. Eighteen candidates submitted completed applications for the competition. Eleven qualified for final-round judging by a New Jersey Department of Agriculture official, a Farm Credit official from Maryland and Dr. Robert Steele, dean of Penn State's College Agricultural Sciences.

Here's a review of this year's winners. Susan Blew is proof that you don't need a big farm to build a future. Her production innovations, marketing savvy, endless energy, plus enthusiastic support from husband Ted and their four children built Oak Grove Plantation near Pitts-

town, N.J. Blew's early years were spent on her parents' dairy farm. After an older brother's auto accident, her dream of farming also crashed at age 16 when her parents sold their working farm. That only deepened her resolve to farm.

The first time she met Ted, she was 16 and he was a young farm manager. After graduating from Bucks County Community College in 1973, she married Ted, who had the same goal - to own a farm. By then, she had added a stipulation to her goal - 'no farm, no family.' By 1975, the couple was farming more than 1,100 acres of rental land. She did the chisel plowing, harrowing, combining and putting away hay and straw. They also began producing crops for their roadside stand. In 1977, their partnership purchased their 160-acre Hunterdon County farm, kept farming the rental land and began a slow shift from wholesaling conventional vegetables to retailing organic specialty produce.

In 1981, they started a farrow-to-finish hog operation and began retailing pork products under their own label. That's also when they discovered Greenmarket, the open air farmers market in Manhattan's Union Square.

Today, Oak Grove Plantation retails 95% of their specialty crops grown on 27 acres and two greenhouses plus 90% of the pork raised in a converted dairy barn.

Their children, Charity, Eric, Amanda and Jonathan, are still at home and involved in the business. Every week, they truck product into NYC's Greenmarket, where she's known as NYC's "Pepper Queen." Ted handles the market end; Susan, the production. She selects and saves seed for 275 hot Chile pepper varieties, 97 sweet pepper varieties, 88 heirloom tomato varieties, 95 herbs, 15 sunflowers, and 30 mesquite varieties. They also market produce, plants, baked goods and a wide range of pork products.



Duane and June Hertzler developed a successful, less stressful grazing-based dairy.

Like most farm kids, Duane Hertzler learned to love the farm while growing up doing chores before and after school. For three years after graduating from Lancaster Mennonite High School, he worked away from the home farm near Mechanicsburg. Then in 1970, before returning home to farm, he met farm girl June at a church-sponsored coffeehouse. She was attending Lancaster General University, studying to become a registered nurse.

Over the next two years, Duane began adding cows to his father's herd. In 1972, Duane

and June married and formed a partnership with his father. In 1978, the Hertzlers struck out on their own, buying their own 200-acre farm near Loysville in Perry County.

Their children, Joel, Neil, Becky and Heather, came along. And Moo-Echo Farms continued to expand into 1993 when they were farming close to 1,000 acres and milking 170 cows. After several severe droughts and a debt load that was also steadily rising, they realized "we were working too hard for the financial gains obtained," notes

Duane.

January 1994 brought their decision to switch to rotational grazing and to build a high-tensile perimeter fence. By April, they were ready to start rotational strip grazing. Since then, they've cut back their farming acreage to about 550 acres, increased their owned land to 315 acres, and boosted their milking herd to 235 cows averaging more than 20,000 pounds production.

In 1999, Moo-Echo averaged more than 1-million pounds of milk per person. Today, the Hertzlers find life more enjoyable, due to reduced debt and grazing-based management. They still find time to be involved off the farm. June is the librarian for their local church and works fulltime as an RN for a juvenile detention center. Duane is a past board member of the local Agway and Ag Choice Farm Credit. He currently serves on the Pennsylvania Beef Council and Perry County's Farm Preservation Board, and has been an elder and a member of the long-range planning committee.



Lewis Riley, transitioned his poultry and crops business to his son while serving as a state ag leader.

Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference Next Week

COLLEGE PARK, Md.—Over the past quarter-century, the Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference has introduced a conservation concept that was new to many crop farmers and provided helpful information on how no-till adopters could refine their cropping practices to achieve the greatest profit potential.

"Hot" topics over the years have included no-till drilling techniques, machinery adjustments, nitrogen application, weed control, crop rotation and soil compaction.

To start off its second 25 years, the conference will offer breakout sessions and roundtable discussions on topics like cover crops, narrow-row silage, zone tillage, manure management, no-till vegetable production and the soil phosphorus index.

For the first time, the conference is scheduled at two locations on consecutive days—February 24 in the Four Points

Hotel at Hagerstown, Md., and February 25 in the Holiday Inn at Grantville, Pa. As in all previous years, the conference is sponsored by cooperative extension at land-grant universities and by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in participating states, with assistance from interested agribusinesses and related organizations.

Identical sessions will run from 8 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. at both locations. A \$20 registration fee, payable by February 16, will include lunch at one location. After February 16, the fee is \$25. Registration brochures will be available soon at many cooperative extension county offices in Maryland and Pennsylvania. Or, contact Joel C. Myers, Pennsylvania state agronomist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1 Credit Union Place—Suite 340, Harrisburg, PA 17110-2993; phone: (717) 237-2208.

Lewis Riley is proud to be the

fifth generation of his family to farm near Parsonsburg, Md. He's equally proud that son Lewis Quinton or "Quint" is part of the sixth generation to own the Wicomico County land. He's not bashful about noting the enjoyment that he and his family get "... get great satisfaction in being 'farm folks.'"

That enthusiasm drove him even as a youth. By age 17, he was farming 60 acres of his grandfather's land. He received Maryland FFA's State Star Farmer award in 1955 and the nation's American Farmer Degree in 1956. At age 20, he married wife Virginia. In 1958, the Rileys bought the first of their four farms - a house and small block of land. The next year, they grew their first chickens in a rented 5,000-bird house. In that same period, they also started their family - Quint, Patti and Terri.

Also in 1959, they bought a used 8,000-bird chicken house and had it delivered to the farm where he fixed it up. And in 1962, another 30,000-bird broiler house was built.

In 1962, he decided to run for county commissioner, and lost. Four years later, he won election to his first job as a politician. In 31 years of public office, Riley served 12 years in county government, eight years in Maryland's House of Delegates, five years in the Senate and six years as Deputy Secretary and Secretary of Maryland Department of Agriculture.

Today, principal ownership and management of the Rileys' Beaver Run Farms, Inc., has been transferred to Quint. The business now handles 120,000 Cornish chickens a year under contract to Perdue. The farm includes 550 acres owned and another 200 acres rented. Beaver Run trades custom work with a neighbor to get haying done. It also markets 500 to 600 hogs and produces feeders from a 75-cow beef herd.

In 1998, Riley resigned as state ag secretary due to his wife's illness. He continues to serve on the Peninsula Bank's advisory board, but chooses to stay close to home and "assist my son as time permits."

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Susan Blew retails 95 percent of the family farm's production in NYC.