



Robert Jackson boosted the efficiency and profitability of his dairy and farming operations.

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

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Robert Jackson's farm roots go deep - seven generations deep in Fayette County. While his father and uncle were Master Farmers of their generation, this generation of Jacksons had to earn his, too, via continual building of the partnership busi-

ness.

After graduating from Penn State with an associate degree in ag business, the Brownsville dairyman returned to work full-time on the farm in 1975. By 1988, his father, Bob (a past Master Farmer), retired from their partnership. The younger Bob took over with a bent toward improving efficiencies and a business sense that has

steadily increased profits almost every year since. One primary reason is that the farm's low debt load has underpinned the business growth over the years.

Today's Double J Farm includes 455 acres, of which 335 acres are cropland. Another 75 acres of cropland are rented to grow feedstuffs for the 125-cow registered Holstein herd averaging close to 23,000 pounds of milk production. Cows are milked a double-six parlor and housed in freestall facilities that provide a stall for every cow. Milking cows are split into high producer and low producer groups and fed for peak efficiencies at both levels.

Cow comfort and consistency in how they are fed and handled is important to Jackson and his three employees. Numerous management practices contribute to the bottom line. That includes monthly foot care and trimming, reliance on total mixed rations and maintaining more than adequate forage supplies to help weather drought year shortages. Written records are important. With them, Bob meticulously tracks cow performance and handles the herd's artificial breeding program.

Wife Joy keeps the farms records on computer, in addition to being mother to their children, Andrea, Amber, Adam and Aaron. Bob and Joy have received numerous awards, including recognition for serving as western regional leaders to Pennsylvania Council of Cooperative's young leader conference in 1993; in 1994, they served as conference chair couple.

Jackson is a past president of the Fayette County Holstein Association, and a current board member. He's also a board member of the local Dairy Herd Improvement Association, an alternate delegate for Dairy Farmers of America and a deacon at their local church.



James Witter expanded dairy and farming operations despite major challenges.

Jim Witter learned early to seek the bright side of life amid the dark. Born in Shippensburg, and raised on a small dairy farm, he wasn't enthralled with dairying until he became a Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA) milk tester at age 18. That work showed him there was a different kind of dairy farming, one he could get enthused about. It also introduced him to his first wife, Joann. And at age 21, they were married and began crop sharing the home farm they bought 12 years later. That same year (1970), Joann died suddenly, leaving him with a daughter and five sons. About six months later, he married Miriam who has been his helpmate ever since. Together, they raised his children Jean, Paul, David, Timothy, Steven and Mark.

Witter's sense of community and flair for fun led to several unusual projects. In 1977, an open house was scheduled for a

new slurrystore being built on the farm. Jim went a step farther and hosted a concert inside it. In 1995, Witterdale Farms hosted a three-acre corn maze. More than 24,000 people walked its two miles of paths -- built as part of the annual Shippensburg Corn Festival.

Today, the business encompasses more than 400 owned acres with 320 acres being cropland. Another 250 acres, mostly cropland, are rented. Son David and nephew Tom manage the dairy herd. Jim's third son, Tim and fifth son, Mark, help with fieldwork and morning milkings. Their 300-cow milking herd averages about 18,700 pounds production. Witter has served on boards and in leadership positions of county farm groups and the local Chamber of Commerce. He's also been active in his local church, and founded the Shippensburg Chapter of Fellowship of Christian Farmers which he still leads.

## State Budget Includes Increases For Animal Disease Prevention And Ag Promotion

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is devoted to support administration of the Farmland Preservation program.

The budget also calls for an additional \$375,000 for the Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission and two new initiatives totaling \$795,000 to help fight animal diseases.

\$720,000 will be devoted to monitoring the West Nile Virus in mosquitoes, birds, and animals. This virus can be transmitted as encephalitis to people.

\$75,000 will go toward a Pennsylvania Dairy Quality Assurance Program to prevent the presence of infection in dairy and beef products.

The \$375,000 will be used by the Commission to fund programs and research to identify and prevent new transmissible diseases.

"These new initiatives and the ten percent increase for the Animal Health Commission will help farmers who are dealing with animal health issues," said Senator Bill Slocum, chairman of the Senate's agricultural and rural affairs committee.

Part of the animal health initiative is increased funds to combat John's disease.

"The Governor's budget proposal also continues 1999's initiative to control animal health emergencies arising from foreign livestock diseases," said Hayes.

Hayes, Bunt, and Slocum all commended the governor for his increased support to promote agricultural products at home and abroad. An additional \$179,000 is devoted to expanding consumer awareness and markets for Pennsylvania's food commodities.

"There is much to like in the Governor's proposed budget from the standpoint of the agriculture industry," said Bunt.

Slocum agreed. "The Governor has treated agriculture real fairly in the budget," he said. "That coupled with the drought relief package from last year is a real plus for agriculture."

From here, the Governor's proposed budget will be introduced as a House bill. Over the next several weeks, both the House and the Senate will hold hearings on the budget.

The House takes action on the proposed budget first and makes amendments to it. Then they send it over to the Senate to address the proposed budget and make amendments.

Eventually a joint-conference committee made up of both House and Senate members will come to agreement and approve their final version. Then the budget will return to Governor Ridge for his signature.

One thing that Senator Slocum wants to see added to the budget is something to address the inheritance tax issue.

"My colleagues and I are very concerned about this tax, which is probably the single number one reason why family farms are lost," he said. "Although it's not in the budget, I am anticipating that we will move in the direction of lowering or eliminating this tax."

One of the things that Representative Bunt wants added is an appropriation for Penn State University to help restore the lost capacity in the College of Agricultural Science.

In addition to the increases that Ridge proposed for ag promotion, farmland preservation, and animal health issues, there are also several other increases included for the Department of Agriculture. Those include:

- ✓ \$201,000 to provide information and technology improvements.
- ✓ \$120,000 to provide equipment for the Bureau of Ride & Measurement Standards.
- ✓ \$109,000 for equipment at the Equine Toxicology Lab in West Chester.
- ✓ \$100,000 for county fairs, along with five percent increases for both 4-H and FFA.

- ✓ \$99,000 to support food safety and plant industry laboratories.

- ✓ \$67,000 to the All-American Dairy Show and a five percent increase for the Keystone International Livestock Expo and the Jr. Dairy Show.

- ✓ \$536,000 for state food purchases.

The budget continues to provide one million to production agriculture through allocation to conservation districts and 3.28 million to nutrient management programs.

In addition to the agriculture budget, Hayes applauded other

budget initiatives that will help rural Pennsylvanians and agribusinesses.

"Financial assistance for volunteer fire and ambulances services, property tax rebates, better education for young people, and improved highways and bridges — these are all things important to agriculture," said Hayes.

"Overall, it's a good solid budget," said Slocum. "It's a great effort to cut taxes and put money where it's needed. It's a great budget for agriculture and for Pennsylvania tax payers."

## Horse Pasture Workshop

BEDFORD (Bedford Co.)—Penn State Cooperative Extension in Bedford and Fulton counties will be holding two horse pasture workshops in Breezewood and Somerset. The Breezewood workshop will be held on March 7, 2000, at the Gateway Travel Plaza and the Somerset workshop will be held on March 23, 2000, at the Ramada Inn.

The purpose of the workshop is to teach horse owners how to improve the quality of their pastures. Topics covered at the workshop will include Managing Soil Fertility, Plant Species Selection, Pasture Renovation, and Weed Management, Poison-

ous Plants, Watering and Fencing for Pastures, and Grazing Management.

Melanie Barkley, Bedford County Extension Agent, said "The workshop is a great way for horse owners to learn how to increase the amount of grass produced in their pastures. Horse owners can then develop a diet for their horses which includes grass."

For more information you can contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension Office in Bedford County at (814) 623-4800 or in Fulton County at (717) 485-4111. Cost for the workshop is \$10.00. The fee includes materials and refreshments.