

Third Generation Fruit Growers Want To Continue Family Tradition



Steve and Judy Slaybaugh are the third generation to farm in Biglerville. They signed up their orchard farm for the state's Farm Preservation program to help future generations stay in farming.

JAYNE SEBRIGHT Lancaster Farming Staff

BIGLERVILLE (Adams Co.) — Steve Slaybaugh's grandfather Glen purchased a farm in 1936. Since then, each generation has added onto the farm to help their fruit business grow.

Now Steve and Judy want to assure future generations of that opportunity.

The Slaybaugh's 228-acre farm is one of more than 100 farms in Pennsylvania accepted into the Farm Preservation program during the last 100 days leading up to Earth Day, which is this Saturday, April 22.

"We wanted to make sure that we did anything we could do to keep future generations going in farming," said Steve, who sees development creeping up around

their farm. A golf course borders one of the farms the Slaybaughs lease, while a large housing development is just down the road.

Steve and Judy farm with their son David, the fourth generation of Slaybaughs to farm, who lives in the farm house with his wife and three children. David's youngest son is 5-year-old Blake.

"Our grandson loves being on the tractors and out in the orchards," said Judy. "We want to give him the chance to farm if he wants it."

The Slaybaughs grow apples, peaches, pears, and cherries. They also raise Christmas trees. In addition to the farm that they own, they also lease three other farms.

Each year the Slaybaughs produce on average 180,000 to 200,000 bushel of apples, along

with 150 to 180 tons of cherries, 10,000 bushel of peaches, and 4,000 bushel of pears. About 50 percent of their produce is sold as fresh produce, while the other 50 percent goes to Knouse Foods in Peach Glen for processing.

"Farming keeps getting harder and harder each year," said Steve. "With chemical, equipment, and other input prices increasing, our product price still stays the same. We have to grow more bushels per acre and increase production to keep up with increased costs."

Although farming is challenging, the Slaybaughs would choose no other life for themselves. "It's a good life," said Judy, who has known her husband of 33 years ever since they were in fifth grade. "You really can't beat life on the farm."

In addition to growing produce and Christmas trees, the Slaybaughs also start their own apple trees in a nursery. "It's been an interest for me," said Steve. "It's a change from fruit growing because you're working with nurseries. You have to plan ahead because it takes two years for the seedlings to be ready to plant in the orchard."

Fruit farming is a long-term business. Unlike "straight farming" as the Slaybaughs call traditional farming, which generates a harvest each day, a newly planted orchard doesn't produce profits for several years.

"For apples, it takes 11 years until you get your first profit dollar," said Steve. "But the apple orchard site should last 25 to 30 years."

To keep up production and remain consistent, the Slaybaughs

regenerate orchard sites each year. "Every time you push one site out, you have to put in a new site," said Judy.

"We're now trying to plant smaller root stocks that are tighter and lower to the ground," said Steve. "Increasing the density of the orchard increases production."

Steve, Judy, and David all work together to make decisions on the farm. While Steve and David handle most of the spraying, planting, and outside work, Judy maintains the book records and relays messages.

During peak apple harvest season, the Slaybaughs employ anywhere from 40 to 50 seasonal workers. "That really makes payroll get more hectic," said Judy.

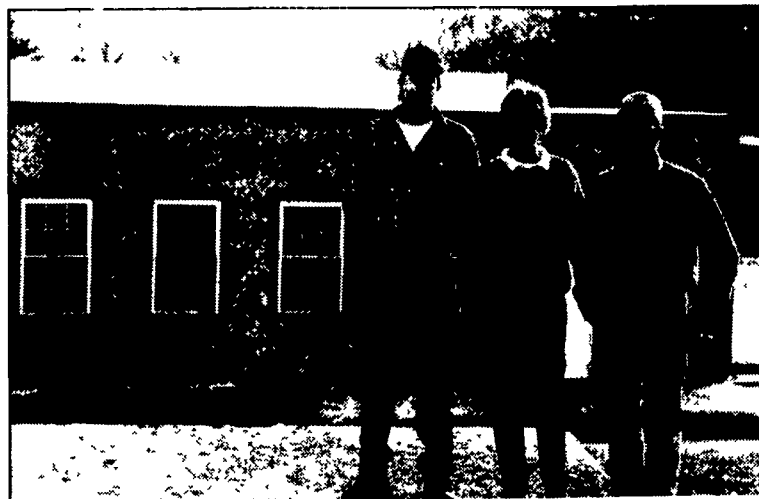
According to Steve and Judy, it takes a lot of people to make a successful farming operation. "We depend on our spray consultants

to help keep disease and fungus away," said Steve. "We also need to work with soil analysts to determine what varieties will grow the best in our soils."

The packers and processors also play an integral role in a profitable orchard. "Everybody has their step," said Judy. "Anything we can do better will produce a greater return for our farm."

Steve worked with his father Richard on the farm until Richard was badly hurt during Steve's first year at University of Maryland. Steve quit college and returned to run the farm. Now he is preparing his son to eventually take over the business.

"Except when he is going hunting, Steve always wants to be on the farm," said Judy. "In 20 years, we hope to give Blake that same opportunity."



Son David and parents Steve and Judy make all the farm decisions together. While farming continually becomes more challenge, the Slaybaughs still believe nothing beats the life of a farmer.

202 Head Exhibit In Maryland Spring Show

TIMONIUM, Md. — 202 Holsteins exhibited in the Maryland Holstein Spring Show held at the Timonium Fairgrounds earlier this month. Of the 202 entries, 130 animals were exhibited by junior members.

Maple Lawn Farms of Fulton won both reserve junior and grand champion of the open show, while Savage Leigh Farms took home reserve grand champion and junior champion of the open show.

Maple Lawn's five-year-old, Medway Astre Mixie, and Chip

Savage's famous four-year-old, Savage Leigh Bellwood Linda, were named the two best cows of the show. Judge Michael Heath of Westmister raved about the two cows' "dairyness with size."

Topping the heifer classes were Oseena MS Starlite-ET, owned by Jami Savage, and Shruppdale Trisha, owned by Amy Iager. The two heifers were champions of both the open and junior division.

Winning junior division grand champion honors were Ryan and Jami Savage. Ryan's senior-two-

year-old, Lylehaven Lindy Delila, was the best of the junior show, while Jami's junior-three-year-old, Savage Leigh Banana split, was named reserve champion

MD-Dun-Loafin owned the total performance winner of the show, a five-year-old Jed daughter, Harvale Barton Crystal, who had 37,070 pounds of milk. Savage Leigh received premier breeder and exhibitor awards and dedicated them to the memory of Wayne Savage's father who passed away just days before the show.



Amy Iager received the overall Distinguished Junior Member book award from Arthur Rhoderick during the show.

Farmer Cooperative Showcase Ag Environmental Successes

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Ag-Earth Partnership, a private-public sector coalition led by the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC), recently launched a series of events building up to April 22, Earth Day 2000, on the National Mall.

Highlighting the theme "Agriculture and the Environment: A Growing Partnership," national leaders and exhibits showcase innovative agricultural efforts and partnership dedicated to conserving and protecting natural resources.

"I am delighted to be a part of this significant effort," said Cooperative leader Glenn Webb, Illinois farmer and Growmark, Inc. board chairman. "It is important that the public gain a better appreciation that we in cooperatives

and agriculture are working hard, not only to provide them with food, fiber and shelter, but also cleaner water and air, wildlife habitat, and open space."

The farmer cooperative leader joined Glickman in presenting the Ag-Earth Partnership's Millennium Farmer Award to Richard, Cori, and Todd Wittman of Wittman Farms in Lapwai, Idaho. The Wittmans, active cooperative leaders and members of Cenex Harvest States Cooperatives, Inc. and AgAmerica/Western Farm Credit Banks, were recognized for their outstanding conservative leadership and efforts to help educate urban America about agricultural stewardship.



Junior champion of the open show went to Oseena MS Starlite-ET, a spring yearling owned by Jami Savage, while Amy Iager's fall yearling, Shruppdale Trisha, took reserve champion. With the winners are from left Sadah Bentz, Frederick Co. Dairy Princess; Maryland Alternate Dairy Princess Laura Kramer; Kelly Myers with the honorable mention of the open show; Amy Iager; Jami Savage; Erin Shank, Washington County Dairy Princess; and judge Michael Heath.