

Somerset County Grapples With Water Issues

GAY BROWNLEE
Somerset Co.

SOMERSET (Somerset Co.) – Issues on water quality, quantity and rights raised lots of questions in Somerset County, April 4. What can we do with water? What can't we do with it?

First and foremost, any use of water must be reasonable and not spiteful. The rule is fairness.

"Do to others as you would have them do to you," will keep peace in the neighborhood when it comes to water – and a host of other issues.

Who thought of that idea?
God did.

Moreover, He owns the water and in different seasons, sends the showers to replenish water supplies.

When the Somerset County Farm Bureau held a water issues meeting for the public, about 80 persons filled the meeting room, in the headquarters of the Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative.

Obviously, they have a justifiable concern about the quantity and quality of and rights to use water in Somerset County.

"We thought there was a need for something like this because of the demand on the water we have," said Kurt Walker, Farm Bureau vice-president and meeting coordinator.

It seemed the ingathering of information from the speakers, sequentially lead to more questions demanding answers. Persons were promised responses later, if their concerns were written on index cards that were collected.

The speakers included two geologists, Jim Casselberry of Casselberry Associates, Boalsburg, and Dave Bomba of Johnstown; Dave Plank, Department of Environmental Protection, Pittsburgh, and Samuel Clapper, a Somerset attorney.

Clapper noted there are three kinds of water: surface water, subterranean (underground) water and percolating waters.

He said the general rule is, if the stream is passing through your property and you are using it for domestic and agricultural use, you are without liability to the person downstream who runs out of water.

"You are not allowed to use water off the land to the detriment of somebody downstream," Clapper reported.

This would include commercial uses of water such as selling bottled water.

In cases of damming up water, you are liable if it backs up and causes damage for your neighbor. Damming, however, is permissible if done for livestock, as attorney said.

If the waters are navigable waters, you cannot deplete it. Navigable waters are strongly regulated, Clapper said.

In cases of the water being polluted, the person responsible for the contamination is liable if there is a way to prove him culpable. But proof there must be, whether the scenario involves a municipality, individual or private user.

The improper use of water must be proved with data and testimony against the alleged misuser. If someone else's drilling took your water, evidence to prove it must be provided.

"Municipalities can condemn water rights but they must provide just compensation," Clapper said. "Once a municipality has the correct permit from the state, the same rules do not apply." He added. "The municipal entity does have the power of eminent domain."

This knowledge drew a mixed murmuring from the group, which was comprised of interested individuals such as farmers, municipal officials, and representatives of local government.

Regarding contamination of water, Dave Plank from the DEP cautioned farmers to use restraint when enriching the soil. "Don't over-fertilize," he said.

In some cases, Plank reported there are farmers who eschew interference and advice about using the water.

"They don't want anyone telling them how to use the water on their land," plank said, noting a nitrate problem in Lancaster County to illustrate his point.

Geologist Casselberry said the quality of water is determined by precipitation acting with the rock strata. The more alkaline, the higher the water quality. The more acid, the poorer the water quality.

"Poor water quality is made worse by mining," he said.

To wit, in recent years the relationship of water quality to lingering effects from decades of coal mining, has become a pertinent topic in Somerset County. The solutions do not come easily or quickly.

Casselberry talked about bedrock aquifers and fractures, explaining how fractures control the ability of water to flow. Wells should be placed near the highest degree of fracturing, according to Casselberry.

When a geologist is engaged to evaluate a well or a water situation, the job can go quicker if the well owner already has recorded facts about the well itself and the water.

"There is no substitute for documentation," he said. "Help yourself by writing everything down on paper. Don't try to keep information in your head."

Such information, for instance, should include an inventory of everything within a half mile, information



About 80 persons listened to experts explain rights and talk about water issues at a meeting sponsored by the Somerset County Farm Bureau.

about the aquifer, the well casing, and water depth during and following pumping.

Geologist Dave Bomba looks at and reviews permits in southwest Pennsylvania. He is responsible for the site survey, a pre-drilling plan, 48-hour aquifer test and a report submitted to the DEP.

During the site survey, for instance, Bomba would note how the surrounding land is being used and the possibility for contamination from those sources. He would learn about other private water supplies in the area.

One couple at the meeting was eager for information, because it has been reported an existing restaurant is planning to drill a new well near the water source for their farming operation, located along Laurel Run Road.

"We want to say 'No,' before the permit process," said Robert and Janet Miller, adamantly. "We don't want it to get to the permit process."

The Millers' 100 head of milking cows and replacement animals drink about 8,000 gallons of water a day when it's hot, but that figure doesn't take into account cleaning and sanitizing the equipment and household use.

Since 1942 the well has not failed; nevertheless, possibility has them worried.

Bomba said nobody had yet contacted him for a permit about the proposed well.



Geologist Dave Bomba uses a marker to illustrate a point when in Somerset County.

Schmidt Earns

Junior Bronze and Silver

ST. JOSEPH, Mo – Jessica Schmidt, Drumore, Pa., has qualified for the bronze and silver awards of the National Junior Angus Association, according to James Fisher, director of junior activities for the American Angus Association.

Schmidt is the 17-year daughter of Pete and Laurie Schmidt and a senior at Solanco High School.

She has shown her Angus in numerous shows at the local, state, regional and national levels. Schmidt has participated in the photography contest at the National Junior Angus Show and has served as Pennsylvania Angus Princess. She is a member in the Pennsylvania Junior Angus Association and has been a member

of the National Junior Angus Association since 1994.

The bronze and silver awards are the first two levels of the National Junior Angus Association Recognition Program that began in 1972. Junior Angus breeders must apply for the awards and then meet point requirements in many areas of participation before receiving the honors.

Applicants are evaluated in the areas of junior Angus association activities, participation in showmanship and leadership competitions, using performance testing to improve their herd, and their progress in producing and merchandising Angus cattle.



Maryland And Pennsylvania Need Dairy Contestants

Many counties need contestants for upcoming dairy princess pageants.

Contestants need to be single between the ages of 16-24, whose parents, guardians, or themselves are employed in a dairy-related industry or own at least two animals of the six major dairy breeds.

Younger candidates are also needed for dairy maid, ambassador, and Little Miss positions.

Candidates should be interested in promoting the dairy industry and will receive training in developing speaking ability and self confidence.

Interested candidates in York

County should contact Gail Thoman at (717) 428-1832.

Lycoming County potential candidates should contact Wanda Derr at (717) 323-4949.

Those from other counties in Pennsylvania who would like to know more about the dairy princess program, should call Jan Harding at (814) 226-7470.

Maryland contestants are also needed. Dairy princess contestants must be between the ages of 16-22 years. Dairy maides between 13-16 years.

For more information about becoming a dairy princess or dairy maid in Maryland, call Patricia or Sarah Bedgar at (410) 357-4296.



Lycoming County 4-H leaders attended the Pennsylvania State Leaders' Forum, State College. Workshops focused on topics to help volunteers become better teachers and counselors of youth. From left are Joyce Stugart, Marilyn Corbin, state leader for children, youth, and families; Norma Zeisloft, Patty Peterman, and Betty Delany.