

Tour Aims To Improve Profitability, Ohio Farm Sustainability

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Raising and selling wholesale vegetables, particularly tomatoes, is a time-consuming, labor-intensive job.

In 1997, the stress of managing a wholesale vegetable operation was starting to wear on Shane Pugh. A change was needed, so that in June he and his wife, Vicki, opened a farm market on their farm north of Marietta and began selling most of their produce directly to consumers.

"I wasn't trying to improve profit as much as I was trying to improve my quality of life by cutting time and stress," Pugh said. "For the amount of money that's being invested, the profit is higher, the amount of hours and stress is down, and my quality of life is greatly improved. The profit will improve even more, eventually. It just takes a while to get a good customer base."

The Pugh's Doak Farm and Doak Farm Market in Washington County is one of the stops in

the 2000 Ohio Farm Profitability Tour Series. The series consists of 22 farm tours across Ohio, beginning with the 900-acre certified organic Wenger Farm in Wayne County on July 1 and ending with Saum Family Farms, a diversified operation in Fairfield County that grows Christmas and nursery trees to complement more traditional commodities, on Oct. 3.

The Doak Farm is the tour's fifth stop and will take place July 21.

"There is a lot of risk involved when growing something for wholesale. By raising vegetables for retail, you cut labor, time, and the amount of money put out to raise a crop," Pugh said. "We've done that and it works. It's working quite well for us. I'm tickled to death with what I've done."

By switching to the farm market, the Pugh's have reduced the amount of labor-intensive tomatoes they grow from 60,000 plants five years ago to about 10,000 plants this

spring. They also stopped growing peppers, green beans, cantaloupe and cabbage, and began growing more sweet corn and pumpkins.

"Sweet corn is a lot easier to handle and requires less labor than tomatoes," Pugh said. "Plus, the planting and harvesting time is more spread out to allow a steady supply of corn throughout the summer. We start planting corn the end of March and won't stop until July 4. That way we'll have corn ready for market from about June 20 through the end of September."

Through the market, they also offer fresh eggs from the family's range chickens and annual flowers and perennial plants from their greenhouse.

They buy cantaloupe, green beans, squash, potatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, watermelon, apples, and other fruits and vegetables grown by other area farmers so they have a variety of things available. The market is complemented by a corn maze

in the fall, along with a straw pyramid, fall decorations, and other items. They plan to add hayrides this fall.

"It was awfully hard to change. I was scared to death," Pugh said. "I was used to doing things in a big scale with the tomatoes, and it was hard to change my habits."

The purpose of the Farm Profitability Tour Series is to help Ohio farm families improve the profitability and sustainability of their farming operations. The farms being toured are good examples of entrepreneurs that have taken advantage of new opportunities through alternative enterprises, different marketing methods, and alternative production systems, said Eric Barrett, agriculture and natural resources agent at the Washington County office of Ohio State University Extension.

"Traditional commodities such as corn, soybeans, and wheat aren't that profitable right now, so these tours can show people how to switch to direct marketing, add an alternative commodity, or do something else unique to help become more profitable," Barrett said. "There is more than one way of making money farming, so why not try something different?"

A packet of information also has been created for tour participants to take home that discusses the topics demonstrated on the tours and how others can try them, he said. The seven areas emphasized are trends in agriculture and what will be profitable in the future; what is marketing; how to add value to an operation; developing a market; what makes an operation profitable and how long until profitability can be achieved; what is available on the family, personal, and community levels to make a change possible; and what is the next step needed to actually implement a new commodity, practice, or marketing style.

The packet will be handed out and various aspects of it discussed at each tour stop, Barrett said.

"A lot of the ideas we've implemented here got their start from traveling and talking with other people at meetings and events," Pugh said. "It was the best time I ever spent. So people should be encouraged to come to these tours. It might help them drastically."

The tour series is sponsored by the Ohio State University Farm Income Enhancement Program, the Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Agriculture Team, the Ohio State University Extension East District Farm Profitability Committee, Innovative Farmers of Ohio, the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

There is no registration, and all the tours are free and open to the public. Tour dates, locations, and some highlights are:

- July 1 — Wenger Farm, Dalton, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlights: 900-acre certified organic farm that produces corn, soybeans, speltz and alfalfa; and preharvest contracting of crops.
- July 6 — Skyline Turkey Farm, Danville, 9 a.m.-noon. Highlights: turkey, hydroponic tomato, cucumber, corn, soybean and fattened lamb production.
- July 6 — Spray Brothers Farm, Mt. Vernon, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlights: one of the largest certified organic farms in the U.S. with certified organic beef, corn, soybeans, wheat, speltz, and hay.
- July 18 — C-J Natural

Meats, Defiance, 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Highlights: grass-based dairy, beef, and broiler operation, and products marketed directly to consumers.

• July 21 — Doak Farm, Marietta, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Highlights: farm market, corn maze, straw pyramid, fall decorations, eggs from range chickens, and flowers and plants from family greenhouse.

• July 25 — Snodde Farm, Minerva, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Highlights: expanded dairy operation with new freestall barn, vegetable production, old barn restored for entertainment farming, and social, educational, and entertainment programs for a fee.

• July 25 — Timberlane Farms, Clyde, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlights: certified organic grain and noncertified, rotationally grazed beef cattle.

• July 26 — Mad River Farms, Bellefontaine, 10 a.m.-noon. Highlights: pumpkins, sweet corn, and other vegetables raised and sold at farm market at farm; flowers and trees also sold at market; and entertainment farming with a corn maze, tours, and dinners.

• July 26 — Freshwater Farms, Urbana, 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. Highlights: raising rainbow trout in closed recirculating systems, converting hog buildings to house systems for raising trout, and yellow perch production for pond stocking.

• Aug. 3 — Dale Filbrun Farm, West Alexandria, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlights: organic meats and eggs, direct marketing to consumers, grocery stores, restaurants, and health food stores.

• Aug. 4 — Todd Smith Farm, Defiance, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Highlights: diversified livestock and crop farm, 40-head cow-calf herd, rotational grazing system, and grazing maize as fed for cows from October through January.

• Aug. 15 — Sigrist Dairy Farm, Dundee, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Highlights: composting manure from dairy farm, bagging and selling at retail outlets as Bull Country Compost; bulk compost sold to landscapers and contractors; and operating bed and breakfast.

• Aug. 15 — Buckeye Pheasant Hunting Preserve, New Lebanon, 1 p.m.-3 p.m. Highlights: raising pheasants and selling to hunters and game preserves through a Website and magazines and dog, guide, and game-dressing services.

• Aug. 15 — Stephen Cook Farm, New Lebanon, 5 p.m.-7 p.m. Highlights: vegetables, flowers, honey, and pick-your-own strawberries on one acre and direct marketing at farm and farmers markets.

• Sept. 5 — Hughey Farm, Washington Court House, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlight: using hoop structures in swine production operations.

• Sept. 9 — Bluebird Hills Farm, Springfield, 10 a.m.-noon. Highlights: organic vegetables marketed through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) arrangement and Alpaca production.

• Sept. 16 — Gasser Farm, Sterling, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlights: certified organic grain and hay production. Milk from 60-cow operation will be certified organic this fall.

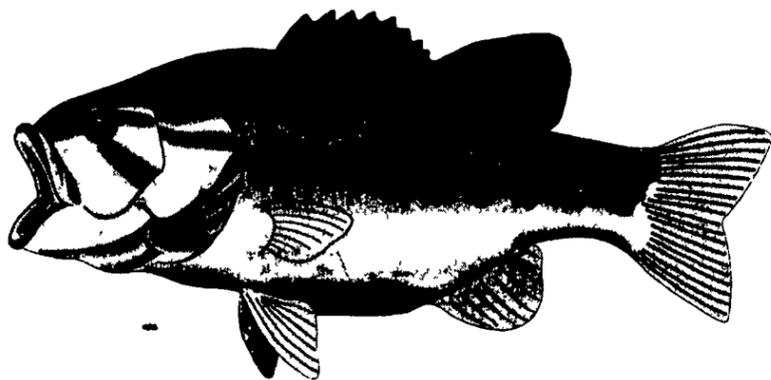
• Sept. 23 — Riskey Agricultural Center, Spencer, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Highlights: 200-acre certified organic farm producing corn, soybeans, wheat, no-till melons, and range turkeys, and education about organic farming and gardening.

• Sept. 26 — Sweeney Farm Jerseys, Somerset, 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Highlight: grass-based, 35-cow (Turn to Page B20)

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LOST STREAM MAP

The STREAM MAP OF PENNSYLVANIA was completed in 1965 after a thirty-year effort by Howard Higbee, a former Penn State Professor.

The map is also known as the LOST STREAM MAP to some anglers.

Professor Higbee succeeded in creating a map of the highest detail possible—a map that shows every stream and lake. He painstakingly plotted by hand, the location of 45,000 miles of streams onto a 3 x 5 foot map.

The map sold extremely well—until it was lost several years later. Incredibly, the printer entrusted with the original drawing and printing plates declared bankruptcy, then carelessly hauled Higbee's 30 years of work to a landfill.

The few remaining dog-eared copies became a prized fisherman's possession. Professor Higbee was offered \$400 for one of his last maps. And state agencies were forced to keep their copies under lock and key.

Experts told Professor Higbee that reprints were impossible, because the maps were printed in non-photographic blue.

Then, in 1991, at the age of 91, Howard Higbee's dream came true. Computers made it possible to reprint the map. Holding an updated map, Howard said, "I never thought I'd live to see this day."