

Ag Progress Days To Open Aug. 15

ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — Visitors can compete in a "largest weed" contest, learn from police officers about farm road safety, watch antique farm equipment demonstrations, or see some cutting-edge inventions and innovations from Penn State researchers at Ag Progress Days, Aug. 15-17.

The event highlights Penn State's role in creating breakthroughs in science and technology. Sponsored by Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences, Ag Progress Days is conducted at the university's Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center at Rockspring, near State College.

Visitors seeking a challenge can wander down to the Crops and Soils Tent. Instead of pulling pesky weeds, gardeners and farmers can bring in two of their largest weeds and try to win the "Largest Weed in Pennsylvania" contest.

Visitors can enter two weeds that have been grown in Pennsylvania. All entries must be cut off at ground level. There are two categories: broad-leaf and grass. Prizes are awarded daily. Nearby is the expanded "A-Maze-N Corn," a corn maze where brave visitors can spend a few minutes or several hours testing their sense of direction.

The college's exhibit, "Inventions and Innovations," focuses on several inventions from Penn State researchers that created usable products for Pennsylvania businesses, as well as examples of how College of Agricultural Sciences researchers adapted and improved existing technologies.

"Most people believe the hardest work is thinking up an invention," said George Hamilton, senior lecturer in agronomy and inventor of the turfgrass

product PennMulch. "This exhibit will show how Penn Staters work through a long process to bring new technology to the market."

The College Exhibits Building will feature a display on Hamilton's PennMulch, a self-contained mulching product for use on lawns and gardens. PennMulch, also sold under the trade name Emerge, created a new product category for lawn and garden retailers.

Another turfgrass-related innovation centers on creating grass athletic field turf surfaces literally overnight. Working with DuPont Inc. and Hummer Athletic Fields, Andrew McNitt, assistant professor of turfgrass science, helped research and test Grass Tiles, a stadium turf system that lays squares of grass over asphalt surfaces to form a full-size athletic field. Visitors can see the machines used to lay

the grass squares, as well as testing equipment used to simulate football games and other types of wear.

Visitors can see high technology in an eggshell at a display featuring a Penn State invention that perfected the process of separating eggshells from the thin protein membrane within the shell.

By separating these materials, an egg-processing company can recover salable calcium from the eggshells and collagen from the shell membrane. Joseph MacNeil, professor emeritus of food science, will demonstrate the original prototype he used to create a technology now used by Cutler Eggs, a Philadelphia egg-processing company.

Other displays will focus on a computer model called CIM-PSU, which uses economic information to predict the effects of bringing new businesses into a

community or to determine how the closing of a major business will affect the economic health of a town.

Farmers and suburban commuters will get a chance to see how to operate farm equipment safely on public roads. Officers from the Northern York County Regional Police Department will deliver a seminar on safe farm vehicle operation methods. The seminar is at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday in the College Building Theatre and at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Thursday in the adjacent College Building Tent.

Safety-minded visitors also can drop by the College Building Tent to see youth compete in the Farm Safety and Health Quiz Bowl on Wednesday. 4-H competitions start at 9 a.m. and FFA teams compete at 1 p.m.

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