

Conservation Exhibits Feature Grazing And More

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Farmers and non-farmers alike can explore an array of workshops, demonstrations and daily tours related to natural resources at Penn State's Ag Progress Days.

"This year's line-up in the Natural Resources Conservation Partnership Area includes new tours on water quality, and grazing and pastures," says Stacy Mitchell, state public affairs specialist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. "The grazing tour will highlight new research on how grazing management can help farmers economically by reducing the pressure to buy feed."

Grazing management is particularly important during droughts, Mitchell explains. To complement the tour, visitors can check out a large plot of different types of grasses. "Planting cool- and warm-season grasses in a grazing system allows farmers to extend their grazing time," she says.

At the Graziers Forum, daily at 11 a.m., farmers from across the state will share their experiences on how grazing benefits their land. This forum is an excellent opportunity for farmers to get ideas from other farmers who have experience with different conservation practices.

Living demonstration areas include watering systems for livestock, waste management systems and solar panels for fencing and pumping water. Plant experts will be on hand to answer questions about site requirements and benefits of

nearly every plant in the northeast.

Homeowners may be interested in an exhibit on backyard composting that features various containers and techniques. A backyard conservation garden, built by Blackhawk Homestead of Centre Hall, will showcase plants that hold soil in place, buffer surrounding noise and provide wildlife habitat.

Worm tanks will provide a "window to the underground" that shows worms in action, improving soil quality. Mitchell recommends visiting this exhibit in the morning, when the worms are most active.

At 2 p.m. daily, representatives from the USDA Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration will answer questions about their role in the livestock and poultry industry.

Children as well as adults will learn from the "stream table," an exhibit that demonstrates how various activities affect streams. "Building a house on a stream may cause the water to cut into the bank," Mitchell says, "but adding plantings and conservation practices might help to reduce the erosion. In this exhibit, you can make the changes, turn on the water and see what happens."

Kids also can practice casting for their next fishing trip, see mounted wildlife specimens, use their sense of touch to guess items that affect soil and water quality and make fish prints from rubber models of Pennsylvania fish.

Visitors who take this year's conservation tour or wetlands and stream corridor management tour will see a newly planted forested riparian buffer. The buffer demonstrates how tree plantings protect streams by filtering out sediments and nutrients. Trees also shade the water, keeping it cool and oxygenated. The schedule of daily tours includes:

Conservation. See practices that improve soil and water quality, including crop residue management, contour strip-cropping, buffer strips, cropland terraces, waterways and diversions. Buses leave at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Wetlands and stream corridor management. Learn about how stream crossings, stream bank fencing and restored wetlands can improve stream bank corridors and water quality. Buses leave at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Forest stewardship. This walking tour will feature wildlife habitat improvement and forest ecology, history and management. Buses to the trail leave on the hour from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. On Wednesday, an additional tour will be held at 5 p.m. Participants should dress comfortably.

Nutrient management. Watch a large-scale composting windrow-turning demonstration and learn how you can prevent putting too many nutrients into the soil. Bus leaves at 11 a.m.

Water quality. A portable rainfall simulator will show how soil management and fertilizer

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or manure applications can affect phosphorus loss from the soil. Buses leave at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Grazing and pastures. See the effects of cow/calf pairs on warm season grasses in an introduction to intensive grazing. Bus leaves at 2 p.m.

Federal and state agencies, organizations and private industries participate in the Natural Resource Conservation Partnership area, including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry, the Pennsylvania Fish and

Boat Commission, the USDA Farm Service Agency, the USDA Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, the Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Conservation Districts and Nutrient Management, the Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Recycling and Waste Management, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Blackhawk Homestead and Canaan Valley Institute.

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