

'Boot Camp' Teaches Ag Conservation Basics

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Monday's "Level II" training was directed toward employees with one to three years experience, building on last year's two training sessions. A possible Level III training may be offered in the future.

NRCS representatives and cooperative extension agents were instructors for the various classes.

Participants broke evenly in two groups in either an engineering or agronomy track for the week. In the engineering track, students identified soils, studied hydrology, and were educated on construction materials. After studying construction materials they would also go on a field trip to a concrete plant.

Soil health, the revised soil loss equation, pasture manage-

ment, and plant identification were the topics for the agronomy track. Trips to farms to note pasture and intensive grazing system was also on the agenda.

The two tracks converged on Thursday and Friday for general conservation planning, as participants discussed how to plan a farm for economic viability and conservation of water and soil.

Many of the participants were returnees from last year's training.

Laurel Rush, Washington County Conservation District, is an agriculture conservation technician who attended the boot camp last year after only three weeks on the job.

"I couldn't wait to talk to come back and talk to everyone else to find out what their experiences and ideas were," said



Twenty-nine technicians spent a week at Fort Indiantown Gap to further their education about agronomy and engineering in agriculture.

Rush. "That's where you learn the most. It helped define what I was going to do in my county."

In the classroom phase, students in the agronomy track learned that sand, silt, clay, bacteria, and fungi can be thought of as a living thing, according to Barry Frantz, resource conservationist for the NRCS.

Soil has a structure similar to a funnel, said Frantz, getting denser the further down into the earth.

The amount of tillage determines how much the cell structure at the top is maintained.

Frantz also educated students on the importance of worms, as their tunnels act like direct conduits for rain to penetrate the soil.

In the engineering track, students learned about engineering equations used to determine moisture, density, and compaction levels for soil, which could be plotted on a curve based on the percentage of moisture to determine the maximum density.

Behavior characteristics of soil, such as plasticity and consistency, are also important to an engineering plan.

Pa. Dairies Benefit From DMLA Program

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check in the mail for \$25,000.

Capp has been managing his own dairy operation for a year and a half, starting up again after his father retired from dairying three years ago.

Capp said he's already been putting the money to use on the farm.

"It helps you get caught after on bills (and) make improvements you don't have enough cash flow to do," he said.

Capp said that so far he's used the money to replace a skid loader, upgrade the free stall barn to make it more comfortable, and replace a few cows.

Payment rates under the new sign-up are about 65 cents per hundred weight (CWT) Total payment eligibility under the former program was limited to 26,000 CWT of milk per base year, but DMLA III raises that limit to 39,000 CWT.

At a limit of 39,000 CWT, all of the milk from a herd of about 175 cows or less with a typical rolling herd average would be eligible for payment under the new program. That includes most of the herds in southeastern Pennsylvania.

According to Jennifer Hershey, executive director of the FSA offices in Lebanon and Dauphin counties, a herd producing 15,000 CWT of milk per year — a typical level for the area — would be eligible for about \$9,700 of relief.

Hershey said that 146 of the 320 dairy farms in Lebanon County signed up under the first two DMLA programs. As of April 16, another 42 have applied for the new payments.

The payments are intended to offset the 35 percent reduction in year 2000 milk prices from the previous 5-year average, Hershey said. She also noted that relief is important to farmers still recovering from the drought of 1999.

"A lot of farmers were still buying feed until last fall to make up for the drought," she said.

Hershey said that although many dairy producers in the past declined to accept government payments, more are doing so in order to remain viable.

"We're seeing many new producers... saying 'this is of economic significance to my program,'" she said.

Farmers interested in applying for the new funds should contact their county FSA office as soon as possible.



Although much of the training was conducted outdoors, students in the engineering track studied soil close up even in the classroom.

Lefever Joins Lancaster Farming

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ick County, Maryland.

"My experience growing up was mostly about the production side of farming," Lefever said. "We worked hard to grow feed and milk the cows. The milk truck came every other day and we made a good living."

With the increasing need in today's economy for farmers to actively sell their own products, Lefever said he is impressed by the growing number of them finding innovative ways to produce and market while demonstrating a strong commitment to land and the environment.

From the home farm, Lefever went on to earn a bachelor's degree in biology from Goshen College and a certificate in secondary education from Millersville University.

After employment in several jobs related to his education as well as a stint in construction, Lefever returned to his farming roots in 1997 when he took the position on the Maryland farm.

"I've taken various jobs and enjoyed some of them," Lefever said. "But I discovered that part of me would always be lost without some kind of connection to agriculture."

In 1998, Lefever and his wife, Katrina, bought the 10-acre remains of a turn-of-the-century dairy farm near Hanover where they garden and raise Jacob sheep.

Lefever is grateful for his wife's own strong connection to the land and livestock.

"Whenever she has an opportunity, she's either planting something or working with the

animals," he said.

In the years since college, Lefever has been steadily engaged in various kinds of writing, including correspondent work for the Hanover Evening Sun and the York Sunday News.

He credits his mother, Ruth, for influencing his interest in writing and reading. She has written articles for various church publications and magazines.

According to Andy Andrews, *Lancaster Farming* editor, Lefever's responsibilities will center on dairy.

"Dave will be responsible for our key issues, including the June Dairy Issue, dairy special publications, government programs, and work on foraging around, the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council section," Andrews said.

"Of course, Dave will also contribute to other coverage areas as well."

For Lefever, writing has always been a tool for trying to make sense of complex situations and problems, whatever they might be.

"Along with farming, writing is one of the biggest challenges I can think of," he said. "You never get to the end of it."

Lefever said it's satisfying to have the opportunity to combine two central parts of his life — agriculture and writing — to earn a living.

"Some of the most creative and dedicated people I meet are farmers and others involved in agriculture," he said. "I look forward to meeting many more of them as part of my new job."

MidAtlantic Farm Credit Reports To Stockholders

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trayed logging as corporate greed or as weird, because the media continually interviewed outspoken but strange characters such as one who wore a T-shirt proclaiming "I eat owls." For the environmentalist viewpoint, the media selected a calm, likeable, parent saying all they want are clean water and air for their children.

News perspectives such as this fuels anti-logging attitudes. And the same tactics are used toward American agriculture, which is often pictured as using harmful chemicals and polluting the air with animal odors, Vincent said.

Farmers know these extremes aren't true, but the truth is distorted for those removed three generations from the farm.

Unfortunately, public policy is being based on ignorance, Vincent said. To get out of the mess we are in, we must fight the enemy — ignorance.

"Tell people the truth. We are the true environmentalists. We pay the price first if we do bad things to food and water. If we weren't doing an amazing job, people would be starving by now," Vincent said of agriculture.

Democracy works but it is not a spectator sport. Rural population is considered disposable and politically impotent because of its small numbers compared to urban areas. But, Vincent believes, if the 56 million people who live in rural areas band together, they can make a difference.

"The world is run by those who show up. Commit yourself to one hour a week to write a letter to the editor or go to the school to talk about who you are and what you do," Vincent said.

Youths are ready to hear from people with hope instead of hearing that they are inheriting a dying planet.

"If we aren't careful, we will become an importer of raw products and exporter of crazy environmental ideas," Vincent said.

At the meeting, J. Robert Frazee and Gerrie McGuire, chief financial officer, elaborated on the inner workings of Farm Credit.

This past year, \$34 million were returned to member-owners despite incurring significant costs in consolidating five associations into one. The consolidation was planned in order to save taxes to make MidAtlantic stronger than ever.

"We could not have achieved successes without the support of the people we serve. Much has been done and much remains to be done, but commitment to serving member-owners remains a priority," Frazee said.

These are some of the goals that Farm Credit accomplished this past year:

- Diversified loan portfolio risk so that no industry represents more than 22 percent of portfolio.

- Strong capital base because they are the largest association in the AgFirst Farm Credit district and the eighth largest in the country.

- Improved efficiency by trimming \$2.2 million in operating costs as a result of the consolidation.

- Expanded mortgage program to meet changing needs of members.

- Influence in communicating agriculture perspectives with legislators.

Members also voted on board member nominees. The results will be announced July 9.