

Complex Issues Addressed At Ag Progress Days

ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — Declining profitability, environmental protection, biotechnology, globalization, and emerging diseases — these issues present multifaceted challenges to farmers, and the solutions can be as complex as the issues themselves.

By visiting the College of Agricultural Sciences Exhibit Building at this year's Ag Progress Days event, Aug. 14-16, visitors can learn how Penn State research and educational programs are addressing these issues. "From the Ground Up: Building a Better Environment"

is the theme for the event. "Ag Progress Days gives us a chance to showcase some of the work we're doing to address problems such as land and water pollution while enhancing farm profitability and human health," said Robert Steele, dean of the College of Agricul-

tural Sciences. "Research and education are critical to finding our way through today's complex issues to answers that work not only for those of us who are here, now, but also for our children and their children."

One College Building exhibit will focus on new uses for farm waste products. The College of Agricultural Sciences and the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences at Penn State are working collaboratively on various projects in this area. For example, plastic jugs used to store chemicals can present a disposal problem for farmers. But new research is uncovering ways to turn used farm plastics into pellets that can be used in manufacturing or as a fuel source.

An innovative truck that gobbles up plastic jugs and turns them into a usable product will be demonstrated at the show — visitors are encouraged to bring empty plastic pesticide containers from home to be recycled by the machine. The exhibit also will feature other research aimed at turning agricultural waste products into profit-generating biofuels that may help to address the country's critical energy needs.

Visitors also will learn how they can conserve water resources and take measures to protect water wells from contamination. In addition, landowners will see why wetlands are important, both as habitat for plant and animal species and as buffer zones to soak up excess farm nutrients and other pollutants that might otherwise contaminate rivers and streams.

Livestock farmers will learn how new quality assurance programs can help them ensure the safety of their food products and find affordable and practical solutions to on-farm environmental challenges. The programs address a broad range of farm

practices — from feed rations and managing manure to animal health care — in a holistic manner. Other exhibits will provide information about launching profitable small farms through niche marketing.

Presentations in the theater area of the building will address current health issues such as foot-and-mouth, West Nile, and Lyme diseases. A farm vehicle and equipment safety workshop and a public forum on hot topics in today's agriculture also are scheduled. On Thursday morning, Aug. 16, the Pennsylvania House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee will hold a "town meeting." Farmers and other members of the public who wish to discuss current issues with committee members are welcome to attend. Crop insurance issues will be addressed at an afternoon session in the theater on Thursday. In addition, visitors to the show will be able to take home a variety of free publications produced by the College of Agricultural Sciences and get information about undergraduate programs.

Because of concerns over the possible transmission of foot-and-mouth disease and other foreign animal diseases, visitors who have been overseas within two weeks of attending Ag Progress Days are asked not to visit the event's live-animal exhibit areas.

Penn State's Ag Progress Days is held at the Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center at Rockspring, nine miles southwest of State College on Rt. 45. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesday, and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday. Admission and parking are free.

For more information, call (800) PSU-1010 toll-free through Aug. 16 or visit the Ag Progress Days Website at <http://apd.cas.psu.edu>.



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