



New Farmers, New Generation

Marion Bowlan

Pennsylvania Farm Link

A New Hope

I was once accused of trying to build a program for new farmers based only on hope. My reply, of course, was that hope was not enough, but I believe that hope is as vital to new farmers as spring is to a new year.

Offering hope to young people who want to start out in production agriculture seems to scoff at current conventional wisdom. To many, the only way to get into farming is either to marry into it or inherit it. Without a lot of financial help, entry into farming seems hopeless. And every new census underscores the continuing steep drop in new farmer entry. The latest census reveals that there are three times as many farmers age 65 or older as those who are under 35.

While the costs of land, machinery, regulation, and just doing business keep rising, profit margins continue to slip. Many wonder why anyone would want to invest so much for the privilege of working outdoors in drought, snow, and mud to earn a modest living with no paid vacation or health benefits.

However, there still is a resilient group who

are finding ways to make farming work and who remain hopeful.

Is there a cookbook recipe for their success? Not really, but these farmers exhibit the following characteristics:

- They work to reduce costs and increase profits while protecting the natural environment and supporting their local communities. In other words, their focus is on working with nature rather than against it.

- They focus on value rather than cost and try to tailor their products to the unique needs and preferences of their customers, instead of trying to fit the customer to their product.

- They market in the niches, they direct market their product using everything from the Internet to word of mouth to advertise

their services.

- They focus on what they do best, capitalizing on their unique skills and abilities. They find markets for the crops or livestock they want to grow and are able to grow well rather than produce for markets where they have difficulty competing.

- Last of all, they focus on creating value through their uniqueness.

Want to learn more about these new farmers, new opportunities, and hope for the future of farming? The eighth annual New and Beginning Farmer Workshop sponsored by Pennsylvania Farm Link will highlight these strategies, including adding value to raw farm products, related but side-line ventures such as farm

Lancaster Farming Posts Winners Of Va. Farm Show Contest

FISHERSVILLE, Va. — *Lancaster Farming* has announced the 10 winners of a free one-year subscription contest from the recent Virginia Farm Show.

tours, and capitalizing on the skills and abilities you have.

Participants will also receive a healthy dose of practical knowledge and advice on how to: convince your banker you have what it takes, protect your land and water resources, safeguard your investment through crop insurance, develop a marketing plan, scout out market leads, and conduct a hands-on walk through your business plan. The workshop will be Feb. 16 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Grantville at a cost of \$30 per person, \$50 per couple, or \$20 per student. For more information or to register, call Pa. Farm Link at (717) 664-7077 or e-mail us at pa-farmlink@redrose.net.

Next month, look for information in this column on the crucial family issues to address in a farm transfer.

Bowlan is a third generation farmer from Lancaster County who heads the Pennsylvania Farm Link Program and works with beginning and retiring farmers on farm transfers to the next generation.

Winners are Thomas A. Hensley, Dayton, Va.; Susan Phillips, Harrisonburg, Va.; Frank Wysor, Beaverdam, Va.; Randy Nelson, McGaheysville, Va.; Joe Higgins, Lexington, Va.; Dawn Maddox, Middlebrook, Va.; Steve Crossman, Madison, Va.; Lynn Koontz, Harrisonburg, Va.; Carl Arey, Bridgewater, Va.; and Robert Showalter, New Hope, Va. Congratulations!

Correction

In last week's paper, *Lancaster Farming* gave the incorrect phone number and address of the contact person for the National Holstein Convention in Atlantic City, N.J. from June 23-27 at the Taj Mahal Hotel and Casino.

Contact person is chairman Joe Valen. His phone number is (732) 568-0219. His address is 333 S. Middlebush Rd., Somerset, NJ 08873. We apologize for any inconvenience.

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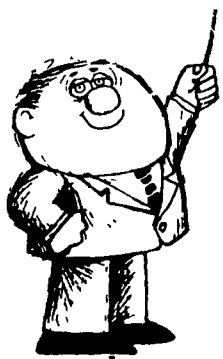
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