

Berks County To Celebrate Farmland Preservation Efforts

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lion dollar bond "solely dedicated to protecting farmland."

With funds also provided by the state's preservation program, the county has about \$10 million to use for farmland preservation annually, enough to ensure 50 to 55 additional farms each year will be designated farms in perpetuity.

According to Mark Wolfskill, the decision to preserve land has helped ensure the family a future and a livelihood in agriculture.

Funds from preserving two of the family's farms went toward the purchase of another neighboring farm four years ago and toward the dairy facility they built on it.

The Wolfskills had already been renting that farm for a number of years to grow crops. When the opportunity came to buy it, Mark saw the future of the dairy operation on the level hill-top overlooking contour strips of corn, barley, and alfalfa.

"I said to David, 'Just look out over here. You can build another barn,'" said Mark.

One of the reasons they chose the site is because of good air movement on the hill for ventilating the animal facilities.

Building the manure pit under the barn was more expensive than building one at an open location. One reason: about 110 concrete and steel posts plus a wall running lengthwise support the 156-by-112 foot slatted floor where the cows stand over the

pit.

But as Mark pointed out, there is "no lagoon to spoil more land" on another site. With the freestall floors never needing to be scraped, the setup also saves a significant amount of labor over the years and helps keep the cows drier, he said.

The soils on the Wolfskill farms are Class 2 and 3, well-drained, silt loam types — a chief factor in determining the land's eligibility for preservation, according to Hildebrand of the county preservation office.

Other important considerations that help farms qualify for preservation are "clustering potential" and "farmland potential."

Clustering potential refers to the amount of neighboring land still used for farming, community support, and whether the land is zoned for agriculture. Farmland potential is determined by looking at the farm operation's ability to grow and be productive. The Wolfskill farms had high rankings, Hildebrand said.

Appraisals for preservation run from about \$1,700 to \$2,300 per acre for the county's farms. The maximum landowners can receive through the program is \$2,000 per acre. If the appraisal is greater than that, owners, in effect, donate the difference between the appraised value and the \$2,000 per acre they receive in preserving the farm.

With high residential development potential in the area, preserving farmland is not a matter



A swing set for the Wolfskill's grandchildren is situated between the freestall barn and the milking parlor.

of "looking for a gold mine" — but will definitely help in passing the farm on to the next generation, Mark Wolfskill said.

The Wolfskills have eight grandchildren, including David and his wife Cindy's two children, ages 5 and 2.

Fulltime herdsman Lorraine Gechter and hired man Harold Keeney, along with his three young sons, are an important part of the operation. Two local students also help out with the milking.

Mark was 10 years old in 1948 when he moved onto the first of the farms owned by his parents, Martin and Anne Wolfskill. They chose "Mar-Anne" as the prefix name for the dairy herd. Mark has been farming here practically his whole life.

"This is a good valley," he said. "We need to keep whatever we can."

The farmland preservation celebration takes place Friday, June 7, at the Wolfskill's Mar-Anne Farms on N. Church Street, sev-

eral miles north of Robesonia. It is open to the public. Registration is at 9:30 a.m. and the program begins at 10 a.m.

Scheduled to speak at the celebration are Scott Sechler, owner of Bell and Evans, the poultry company, and owner of a Berks County preserved farm.

Guests are also welcome to tour the Wolfskill dairy facilities. A light lunch will be provided.

For more information about the event, call (610) 378-1844.



These cows are standing on slatted floors above the built-in manure pit.

McDonald's Official Responds To Beef Criticism

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Responding to the concern of the Livestock Marketing Association (LMA) over its decision to use imported beef, McDonald's Corp. recently said it was committed "to the U.S. agriculture industry," noting it is the largest purchaser of U.S. beef.

The burger giant, in a letter to LMA President Patrick Goggins, also said its imported beef "must meet the same requirements as the products produced domestically, including our requirements for feed certification and animal welfare."

Goggins last month wrote Michael Roberts, president of McDonald's USA. He expressed the marketing sector's concern over McDonald's decision to use imported beef at about 400 of its restaurants in the Southeast.

Goggins also pointed out that LMA and beef industry groups several months ago agreed to "implement a somewhat onerous producer certification program demanded by McDonald's... to assure that the domestic beef supply was meeting the highest standards of food safety."

Given the imported beef deci-

sion, Goggins said many markets and producers "now feel abandoned by McDonald's... decision..."

McDonald's repeated its earlier claims of a "shortage of lean beef in the U.S." The letter, signed by the senior vice president for supply chain management, also said the "vast majority" of the beef in its hamburgers comes from U.S. beef. It also noted that "all national hamburger chains have used or are now using a significant portion of imported beef."

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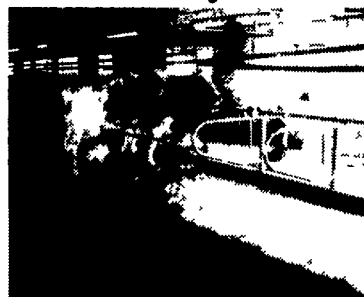
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