

Bigger, Better Farm Show Complex

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For Expansion

On Sept. 29, 2001, *Lancaster Farming* ran a story about a proposed expansion of Farm Show bigger than ever before.

When there's talk of an upgrade worth about \$90 million, that's big news.

And the Farm Show Complex has gotten an upgrade so big it's going to make attending the winter agriculture showcase event hosted by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture surely a memorable, maybe even completely new, event.

For years, people have talked about making necessary improvements to the Farm Show Complex. But according to Farm Show Executive Director Dennis Grumbine, this is the first time "since '29 and '32 that anybody has made a financial commitment to doing something here," he said.

Grumbine spoke to about two dozen exhibitor representatives and media at the complex in September 2001 about the expansion project.

He provided construction details and timetables on a complex that, when completed for the Farm Show of 2003, will house 27 acres under one roof, including a large equine exhibit arena.

An additional 359,000 square feet of booth and exhibit space for Farm Show also includes a brand-new, Class A exhibit facili-

ty with room for 1,100 10-foot by 10-foot booths with 10-foot alleyways. The exhibit building measures 175,000 square feet.

The exhibit facility, located to the north side of the Large Arena, includes the most updated technology and has quality-controlled air conditioning and heat. Doors in the new facility measure 16 feet high by 24 feet wide to accommodate entryway for exhibit setup in the new building.

The old main hall exhibit building, measuring about 145,000 square feet, now houses the family living center, once located upstairs in the Northeast Building. That Northeast Building area was scheduled to be completely renovated to accommodate an upscale, ballroom-type banquet hall to accommodate 1,800 guests for "any livestock or equine event," said Grumbine.

A special Equine Arena rivals the Large Arena in scale, with 303 horse stalls. An additional \$10 million was directed by Gov. Ridge early in June that year to construct the center.

A practice area is included for horse exhibitors. There is seating for 1,500-1,800 people.

A major ingredient — and a persistent challenge to the commission and Farm Show coordinators over the years — has been to separate the movement and passage of livestock and people,

according to Grumbine. That has been accomplished by a special "spine" — a two-story, 30-foot wide passage area connecting both the south and north ends of the entire complex.

The upper level of the spine will allow pedestrians to walk across the length of the complex and visit posted exhibit areas. The lower portion will be used to move livestock to various locations.

Also, where the Mac machine was once located in the Cameron Street entrance, is the site of a new lobby and entrance, which will bring Farm Show Complex visitors directly to the spine.

A "hole" was punched out of the Large Arena, 32 feet wide by about 12 feet high, to allow equipment access to the arena, something the commission believed was past due.

The new equine arena, located in back of the new lobby, will include 150 by 300 feet of space for horse and other exhibits. That's larger than the existing Large Arena.

In mid-September 2001, fencing was installed to start construction of the new exhibit area. As a result, parking at the site for Farm Show was limited to exhibitors only.

Visitors to the complex for the 2002 Farm Show were shuttled to a new parking lot, finished in the fall 2001, south of Elmerton Avenue.

For an approximate \$5 fee, visitors paid for shuttle service at various times to and from the parking lot to the Farm Show Complex for the 2002 Farm Show. There is room for about 2,150 vehicles at the new parking site.

"Parking and traffic have always been a problem for the Complex," Grumbine said. The 29 acres of offsite parking could offset those challenges.



The Capitol Rotunda Dome is symbolic of the efforts of legislators from the past administration to improve the Farm Show Complex, located in the middle of the "spine."

The parking is fenced, gated, and macadamized.

The equine arena began construction shortly after the 2002 Farm Show. From June-August of 2002, the "spine" area was constructed and finished in the fall of 2002.

The commission expects all construction, with some minor checkups and adjustments, to be finished in time for the 2003 Farm Show.

Several areas, including the Large and Small arenas and the new complex improvements will be heated, air conditioned, and air quality controlled, noted Grumbine.

For the 2002 show, the commission worked with signage experts to allow spectators to park and take shuttles to the Farm Show.

"Ten major events will use this complex right out of the box," said Grumbine. "And the Equine Center is not just an equine center, but is open for other livestock."

Grumbine noted the importance of being competitive and drawing in the summer activities. There was a limit to sign-up for summer events because of a lack of air conditioning and air quality control.

As for the new complex, "We're pretty excited about it," Grumbine said. He noted the complex is "able to accommodate any trade show or event in the world."

The Farm Show Complex already houses 211 events, bring-

ing in \$480 million in economic activity to the capitol region and \$13.6 million in sales tax revenue.

Construction provides a "close match" of the facility in terms of brick and other materials. The new exhibits area is "offset" from the roadside to allow a glimpse to the existing historical structure.

The budget has allowed the building to stable more than 3,000 horses in the complex.

"We want to make this new facility competitive," Grumbine said. "This will allow us to expand our show season in the summer months."

As a result, the possibility of stretching out the Farm Show over two weekends is a reality. The show runs from Saturday, Jan. 11 this year to Saturday, Jan. 18.

The Farm Show Commission considered an underground parking proposal. But that was put aside because of the need for "constant dewatering," said Grumbine.

Complex offices are relocated near the lobby on the second level of the "spine."

Said Grumbine, "Farm Show is still our cornerstone event — the reason the facility was put here. We subscribe to the ag events that are held here, and others as time permits."

On Aug. 3 last year, *Lancaster Farming* ran an update on the construction. A column written by Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Sam Hayes called "Building For the Future — On Schedule" continued to update readers on a regular basis.

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Big cranes were a common site at the end of July on the Cameron Street side of Farm Show. Large air conditioning units were hoisted into place.