

New Cumberland County Ag Group To Canvas Farmers

CARLISLE (Cumberland Co.) — Volunteer visitors will canvas about 100 of Cumberland County's farmers during January and early February in a survey to understand their concerns about agriculture.

The farm visitation program is sponsored by a new organization, the Future of Cumberland County Agriculture (FOCCA). FOCCA, originally started by the Penn State Cooperative Extension board in Cumberland County, is an alliance of citizens and representatives from various organizations who are concerned about the future of agriculture in the county.

FOCCA volunteers will visit the farms to conduct face-to-face surveys. These community leaders are being trained on how to conduct the survey, which will pinpoint farm needs, concerns, and development plans.

Farmers will be interviewed about a number of topics, including markets, availability of supplies, and development pressure. Those interviewed were selected from lists of farmers provided by local agencies.

Once the interviews are complete, Penn State faculty and Cumberland County community leaders will analyze the information and prepare an initial draft

report for the FOCCA task force, including recommendations. Individual farm data will be kept confidential.

The FOCCA task force, made up of representatives from across the county, will use the report and a strategic planning process to develop an action plan for agriculture. Local implementation teams will then spearhead efforts to achieve the goals in the action plans. Farms, agribusinesses, other local businesses, and a variety of agencies may be drawn into the process by these teams.

According to County Extension Director Duane Duncan, FOCCA grew out of a study group that reviewed the challenges facing Cumberland County Agriculture, market and production trends, and possible solutions. A recent Penn State survey found that more than 40 percent of the county's farmers did not know whether their land would still be farmed in 10 years. Uncertainty means farmers will be hesitant about investment decisions they need to remain competitive, making them more likely in the long run to go out of business.

According to Duncan, FOCCA has several goals. In the short-run, the group hopes to provide community support for local

farms, resolve immediate individual farm concerns, and increase the public's understanding of agriculture's role in the county.

Duncan said long-run goals include increasing the competitiveness of local farms and agribusinesses; sustaining a healthy local

farm economy and improving the business climate; and implementing a strategic action plan to ensure the future of farming in Cumberland County.

During November, FOCCA sponsored three "Let's Talk" meetings attended by over 100 citizens and farmers. Concerns

and opportunities raised at those meetings helped shape the farm visitation questionnaire being used across the county this month.

For more details about FOCCA, contact Duane Duncan at the Cumberland County extension office: (717) 240-6500.

Visitors Choose Top Winners In Farm Show Christmas Tree Contest

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Among many of the attractions at the Farm Show this year was a forest full of trees residing in the McClay Street Lobby of the Farm Show Complex.

This assortment of fine Fir, Pine and Spruces were all gathered to compete in the Christmas Tree Competition. Judging the contest was James Thomas, a resident of Bel Air, Md.

Darryl L. Bowersoy, Middleburg, exhibited the grand champion Christmas tree which was the first place winner in the Concolor Fir class. The reserve champion was the first place Fraser Fir of Paul Shealer, Auburn.

The two champions were chosen by the Farm Show visitors who cast their votes for the top two from the eight trees placing first in their classes. The winners

will have the opportunity to exhibit at the national level during the 2004 convention scheduled to take place in Pennsylvania.

Thomas judged the 53 entries made by nineteen exhibitors based on competition guidelines. Trees must be between six and eight feet tall, grown exclusively in Pennsylvania, and compared on such categories as Foliage, Taper, Density, Handle, Color, Naturalness, and Damage/Defects, which could include crooked stems or holes.

Thomas scanned the trees looking for quality representations in each of eight classes. He also looked for debris like leaves and dead branches, along with insect damage that could mar the overall appearance of the tree.

The judge said that the trees should look "as natural as possible, and not too tight." He is an experienced tree grower and judge, critiquing trees in Maryland, North Carolina, and now Pennsylvania, and was a former Director of the National Christmas Tree Association.

Paul Shealer, a Christmas tree grower from Schuylkill County, told about what he likes to see in a Christmas Tree. "A good tree


will have many places to hang ornaments." Additionally, he discussed the many color variations within a species, and differences in natural look when a tree has been excessively sheared compared to one that has been left untouched.

Shealer has had the honor of displaying his Christmas trees in Washington D.C. at the White House. This honor comes to those who exhibit and win at the National Christmas Tree Convention held once every two years. For Pennsylvania growers to make the trip to the National Convention, they must not only have winning trees in the eyes of the judge, but the public will be the final critics.

This year's class winners were:
Class 001: Scotch Pine - Tom & Audrey Balthaser, Millerstown.
Class 002: Douglass Fir - McClellans Tree Farm, Middleburg.
Class 003: Colorado Blue Spruce - Abrar-zinskus Nursery, Catawissa.
Class 004: All Other Spruces - Quaker State Plantations, Bloomsburg.
Class 005: All Other Pines - Ron Huntzinger, Schuylkill Haven.
Class 006: Fraser Fir - Paul A. Shealer, Auburn.
Class 007: Cane Fir & Other True Fir - Matesevac Christmas Trees, Elizabethtown.
Class 008: Concolor Fir - Darryl Bowersoy, Middleburg.



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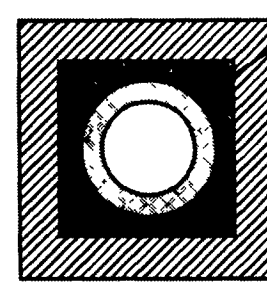
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