

# Sign Up To Grow For Market Nutrition Program

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Agriculture Secretary Designee Dennis C. Wolff reminds Pennsylvania growers that sign-up for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program is underway.

"The Farmers Market Nutrition Program is a great partnership between those who grow Pennsylvania fruits and vegetables and those who need them," said Secretary Wolff. "This is a great direct marketing opportunity for Pennsylvania farmers. Since the introduction of this program, many farmers have launched or expanded their retail operations, providing additional income to their farm operation."

The Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides coupons to eligible recipients to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from approved growers at one of Pennsylvania's farmers markets or roadside stands. Growers interested in participating in the 2003 program must own or lease farmland in Pennsylvania where they produce and sell over \$1,000 of agricultural products. More than 50 percent of the retail value of the produce sold under the program must be grown in Pennsylvania.

Growers who participated in the 2002 program received notices from the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Food Distribution. For any other farmer interested in participating in the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, contact the Bureau of Food Distribution at (800) 468-2433. The program will begin on June 1, and continue until November 30.

The Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides coupons to eligible Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) recipients and qualified seniors to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from over 625 approved vendors in Pennsylvania. In 2002, over \$5 million in state and federal funds were available for the WIC and seniors programs. WIC mothers and children ages 2 to 5 can receive \$20 in coupons. The Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program was launched in 1998 for older Pennsylvanians. In 2002, the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program was offered statewide. Last year, qualifying seniors received \$20 in coupons. More than 96,000 seniors redeemed over \$2.2 million in coupons in 2002.

# Farm Market Evolves To Satisfy Demand

(Continued from Page B2)

tween Manheim and Lebanon, where they erected a permanent building.

By this time, their two daughters were teenagers. Daughter Shelly designed the structure as a vo-tech drafting project.

Not only did she provide the blueprints for the family business but the venture brought acclaim from her instructors. Her project was so impressive that she was named student of the year for the entire school. Bob's brother served as the general contractor, and the family pitched in with insulating, painting, and more.

The building design incorporates a silo-like addition attached to the main barn-like building with a loft for selling crafts and collectibles.

Hitz Farm Market has evolved to an extent with the times.

"When we began, we thought fresh fruits and vegetables would make up the larger part of our inventory. Instead, it's a much smaller part. Customers are most interested in the deli items and baked goods," she said.

Although they planned for the deli, they did not intend to serve lunches to customers. But so

many customers inquired about lunches that it seemed the logical step to take. Today the lunch time crowd makes up most of their business.

Deli items vary from day to day, but include at least 40 deli items made from scratch every day. Some of these are chicken pot pie, soups, meats, puddings, salads, and much more. They also can and market chow chow, apple butter, pickles, jams, jellies, and their own signature salad dressings.

Both Bob and Ruth are adept in the kitchen. They use a combination of old family recipes and new ones that employees and friends give them to try.

Both Bob and Ruth like to improve in the kitchen.

"I hate to follow recipes. I like to experiment," Bob said.

His improvisations can easily be incorporated into the menu because the items vary from day to day. He does try to measure added ingredients so that he can duplicate recipes that are big hits with customers.

Ruth is also creative in baking. She came up with a chocolate roll filled with a peanut butter and cream cheese mixture — only one of the many unique desserts available.

"I don't like to make the same thing twice," she confesses. That's one of the reasons customers will find lots of variety at the deli counter. The two full-time employees and four part-time employees also spend a lot of time in the kitchen. One rolls most of the pie dough, but Bob makes most of the pie fillings.

Two student employees provide most of the customer service and bulk food bagging.

The kitchen is a bright, curved area placed inside the silo-shaped attachment to the store.

Since the Farm Market opened a garden center and a greenhouse were added, which almost doubles the space of the original store area. The greenhouse is used

more to protect purchased plants from damaging weather than for growing. Bedding plants, geraniums, herbs, vegetables, hanging plants and planters are sold along with outdoor furniture and wooden rocking chairs. Bob also makes many of the bird houses sold.

Catering parties, banquets, and special events is another aspect of the business.

"I do catering as a hobby so I try to downplay that aspect of the business," Ruth said. "I don't push it because I don't want it to conflict with our daily duties."

Although the couple share kitchen duty, they also have individual responsibilities. Bob is responsible for maintenance, and Ruth for the bookkeeping, mostly completed at home.

Preparing all the food sold during holidays is a daunting task. Ruth keeps charts and records detailing the amount of pies sold and so forth so that they know about how much to prepare at the same time the following year.

"I write the lists, he's more of the manager," Ruth said.

The market is never open on Sunday nor on holidays.

"We were told by many that we'd never make it if we didn't stay open on Sunday," Ruth said. "But we believe if the Lord doesn't bless us in six days, he won't in seven."

It's been 11 years, and the Hitz family is pleased with the way business has prospered.

"We didn't realized how much our farm background prepared us for this," Bob said of tackling whatever jobs need to be done in operating a business.

"I was always taught that if you have a dream — go for it," Ruth said. Her dad Henry Heagy recently received a century farm award in Lebanon County.

One thing the Hitzes still have in common with their days on the farm: "We work from sunup to sundown," Ruth said.

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