

Cuba: Sustainable Agriculture

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arrangements with the government as long as they farm, they keep control of the land. In contrast to the U.S., there are also limits imposed on the size of privately owned, agricultural operations.

Success in achieving sustainability of Cuban livestock production lags behind that achieved with vegetables and fruit. It is impressive, though, that pork and poultry production, occurring in more diversified systems on small farms, have reached levels that existed before the crisis, when most all animals were raised in conventional confinement facilities. And university research conducted in Cuba, using sustainability indicators they have developed, has concluded that a dairy operation managing 20 cows provides the maximum level of efficiency.

Throughout the tour, on every stop and around every corner, we found evidence of an innovative spirit that was reminiscent of many sustainably run operations in Pennsylvania. But in contrast to the common attitude in our

own homeland, the success of such innovation is seen by Cubans as critical to the future security of their country.

As an example, and in light of the crisis faced since 1989, two different Cuban officials made the following comments: "Sustainable agriculture has become an integral part of our national defense ... a 'war' of the people," and "Our soils are a strategic natural resource." These are the words of leaders who knew keenly that mass starvation might very well be the alternative.

The Cuban farmers we met along the way beamed with pride as they told of what they had achieved against overwhelming odds. Starting with the aim to feed their own families, feed their communities and, for the most part, their society.

Few, if any advocates for sustainable agriculture in our own country would wish to swap our government or economic circumstances with those found in Cuba. But it sure doesn't hurt to see an example of how we might utilize the principles of sustainability in the U.S. to avoid our own Special Period in the future.

Winter Snow Restricts Spring Planting

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — After facing two years of drought conditions in Pennsylvania, farmers welcomed the myriad of snow falls this past winter. As the snow melts this spring, it will undoubtedly help replenish low water levels while providing the soil with moisture to help nourish future crops. Thawing out from all this snow, however, will also steal valuable time from the upcoming spring planting season.

"Farmers throughout Pennsylvania will have to concentrate their efforts into minimal amounts of time this spring," said PennAg Industries Association President, Robert Gueldner of Best Feed and Farm Supplies, Inc. in Oakdale, Pennsylvania. "The fields will need to be prepared faster than normal which could mean working long hours into the night and on weekends."

Not only are extended hours required this spring, but more

hands will be needed as well. The good news is that if you're looking for a little supplemental income during this time of economic downswing, many farmers will be hiring temporary part-time field hands.

For those rural residents who are worried about the spring rush disrupting their daily routines, fear not. Most farmers are well aware that plans are already underway for May graduation parties and June weddings and will try to minimize any disturbances whenever possible.

"While most people were enjoying the beauty of the snow-covered landscapes this past winter, Pennsylvania farmers were already planning for the corn-on-the-cob that you'll want to compliment your hamburgers and hot dogs at this summer's picnics," Gueldner said.

N.H. Farmers Win Land Stewardship Honor

STRATHAM, N.H. — John and Lorraine Merrill of Stratham, N.H., have won American Farmland Trust's (AFT) 2003 Steward of the Land Award, the largest nationwide award for land stewardship.

The Merrills were chosen out of 117 applications from 41 states to win the \$10,000 prize, which was presented to them for their lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship, public education, policy activism, and farmland protection.

"For decades, the Merrills have been devoted to protecting not just their farmland, but water, wildlife habitat and natural resources on the farm," said AFT President Ralph Grossi. "They truly are stewards of our land and a great inspiration to farmers across the nation."

Stuart Farm is situated in the Great Bay Estuary region, a coastal habitat that encompasses more than 10,000 acres of tidal waters and is considered one of the most important estuarine systems on the East Coast. The Merrills have gone to great lengths to ensure that this fragile ecosystem remains intact: they constructed a freshwater wetland to treat waste runoff, and cooperated with Partners for Fish and Wildlife to restore a salt marsh on their farm.

"The restored salt marsh on the Stuart Farm is one of the most thoroughly researched on the East Coast and has become a model for similar efforts," said Bruce Marriott, retired agriculture program leader at University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, who nominated the Merrills for AFT's award.

The Merrills' operation, Stuart Farm, is a 200-cow dairy farm that is run by John and Lorraine, in partnership with their son Nathan and daughter-in-law, Judy. They were early pioneers in rotational grazing and other conservation practices, and their family was among the first in the state to permanently protect their farm with an ag-



John and Lorraine Merrill of Stratham, N.H., have won the AFT 2003 Steward of the Land Award

ricultural conservation easement with the help of state and federal conservation programs that encourage stewardship on private lands.

The family's environmental achievements were accomplished

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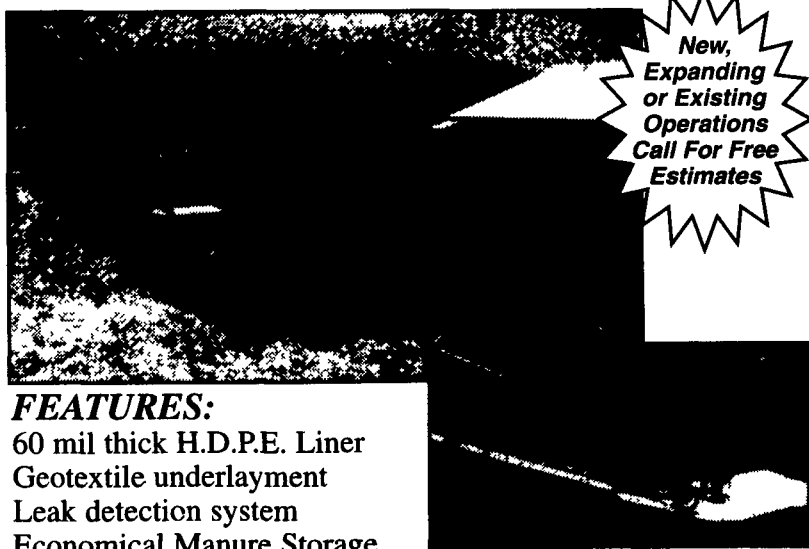
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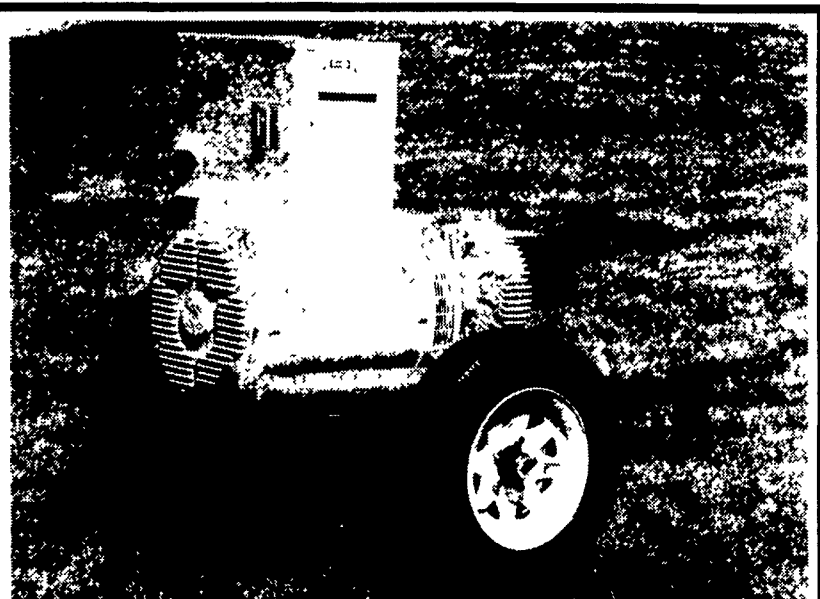


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