

York Swine Operation Advances

(Continued from Page A1)

hearing that included testimony from more than 30 local residents and farmers, Craig and Jennifer Metzler found out they will be allowed to move ahead with their plans to build two 2,200-unit hog barns in Peach Bottom Township.

At the end of the four-hour meeting June 6, township supervisors announced that a draft ordinance designed to limit hog finishing operations to 750 head would not apply to the Metzler's

project because the Metzlers had applied for a permit before the proposed law to limit CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) was made public.

Supervisors also decided to postpone voting on the ordinance, saying a number of its provisions need to be reviewed based on resident input.

Residents of Susquehanna Trails, a nearby residential community of some 1,000 homes, have raised an outcry since learning about a month ago of the Metzlers' plans to build the hog

houses. Gilbert Malone, township solicitor, drafted the ordinance to limit CAFOs and advertised it to the public on May 19.

The Metzlers had begun planning for the project after learning in February that they had been approved by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for a low-interest loan to help them buy the farm through the USDA's

Young Farmer Program.

The federal government has owned the abandoned 90-acre farm since 1999. The FSA put it up for sale to qualified young farmer applicants early this year. To be eligible for the program, young farmers must be purchasing a farm for the first time and have farm management experience.

Craig Metzler, 28, manages 100,000 broilers and a 300-400 steer feeding operation for Star Rock Farms on a property less than a mile from the FSA farm. According to Metzler, he was randomly chosen from a handful of qualified applicants to receive a loan of up to \$200,000 at 5 percent interest to purchase the farm. The Metzlers received the balance of the financing through People's Bank.

"When we were chosen, obviously we were pretty excited about it," Metzler said.

Possible options for adequate cash flow included putting in a 450-cow dairy operation or a 4,400-hog setup. The Metzlers chose hogs because of labor limitations and other drawbacks they saw in the dairy plan.

A number of Susquehanna Trail residents at the June 6



Craig Metzler at the site of the proposed hog barns. Photos by Dave Lefever

Summit

(Continued from Page A21)

pening in Pennsylvania," Brubaker said.

Brubaker said that a portion of the hog manure from his operation is used to fertilize crops on his 325-acre farm and the rest is given away to neighboring farmers who are happy to have it.

"It's providing a resource that's used in the area," he said. "Neighbors as a rule are anxious to get manure."

"We really see ourselves as sustainable," said Brubaker, who had his first facility for contract hogs built in the early 1990s. "It's enabled our three children to farm. After 10 years, we're pleased with it."

Brubaker, who ran an independent farrowing operation prior to the early 1990s, said he has a good relationship with his neighbors.

"I think we had more complaints when we had 120 sows than we do now," he said.

Caressa Crone is a hog producer from Danville, Northumberland County. A family partnership on the 2,500-acre Pinchurst Acres farm includes her husband Richard and his parents. The Crones manage two 2,200-head hog finishing facilities.

"I'm disappointed at some of the mistruths I've heard during the hearing," she said of the hog summit. "I'm not quite sure why we're getting all the potshots. We're not saying 'let's exclude (free-range producers).'"

The Crones use a commercial sorting barn that allows for more efficient hog sorting and monitoring. From Penn State, they are also buying a digester that will use the gas from the facilities and help prevent odors. Manure is pumped directly to the digester. Stacks under the barn hold both the raw and finished manures, eliminating the need for another storage structure.

"We've taken a very responsible role as farmers, because it's our livelihood," Crone said.

As far as accepting producers who want to raise free-range hogs, "I think there's room for both of us. We have to give consumers the choice," Crone said.

Managing the hogs for an outside corporate owner provides income stability, according to Crone.

"I would not want to own the pigs myself," she said. "I need a guaranteed income."

"My perception is that my product is just as good as (free-range) pork," Crone added.

Also on hand at the conference were Craig Richard and his son Nate, age 20. The Richards run two 2,350-head hog finishing barns in Columbia County and farm about 1,900 acres. Nate is an agribusiness major at Penn State and said he hopes to be able to return to a viable farming operation.

One tool the Richards use to control odor problems when spreading manure is a commercial odor-reducing applicator. According to Craig, the implement cuts odors by at least 50 percent and improves nitrogen utilization. The applicator works by poking holes in the soil and then blowing the manure into the holes. It can also be used simply as a soil aerator.

Craig Richard said he doesn't believe so-called sustainable farming methods will be able to provide enough food to U.S. consumers.

"Sure, that might be a nice way to farm," he said. "But there's no way sustainable ag is going to feed this country."

Representatives from the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) at the summit expressed similar views.

"I'm pleased that these producers have found their niche," said Barb Determan, former NPPC president and independent hog farmer from Iowa. "I hate to see them tearing down other parts of the industry."

Determan's family operation markets 3,000 hogs per year and makes use of risk management strategies such as forward contracting.

A new "environmental matrix" program in Iowa has made the permitting process tougher and credits producers who employ the best management practices, Determan said.

meeting opposed the hog operation, saying they were worried the two 226-by-82 foot hog barns would cause odor problems and reduce property values in their neighborhood, located in a wooded area to the east, on the other side of Rt. 851. The nearest downwind residence stands about 1,000 feet away, according to Randy Hoover, an engineer with TeamAg agricultural consulting.

Hoover worked on manure storage design and erosion measures at the five-acre site. He said the planning process is geared toward reducing odors and any other environmental problems as

much as possible.

"I think (Metzler) has pretty much located the barns the best he can to be cost-effective," Hoover said.

Gases from the hog barns will be released via exhaust fans on the east side of the buildings. A woodlot between the hog facilities and Susquehanna Trails would help filter out odors, according to Hoover.

Some residents wondered if the barns could be situated differently so that gases wouldn't be released in the direction of their

(Turn to Page A23)

