

## Conservation District Celebrates 40 Years



The staff of the Armstrong Conservation District, which is celebrating 40 years of service to Armstrong County, is pictured above. From left, front row, Cindy L. Smith, district clerk I; Sharon Cockroft, district clerk II; and Laurel Hoffman, nutrient management technician. Top row, David R. Rupert, district manager; David Beale, watershed specialist; and Christine Cramer, erosion and sedimentation technician.

**KITTANING** (Armstrong Co.) — The Armstrong Conservation District's staff, board of directors, and volunteers have been celebrating the organization's 40 years of service to maintain and improve the county's soil and water resources.

When it was established in February 1963, the focus for conservation was on the county's farmland. There was limited staff, a manager and committee of advisors, mostly from the agricultural community.

The mission of the Armstrong Conservation District (ACD) was "to provide for the conservation of soil and water resources; assist in watershed protection and flood prevention; to prevent damage to dams and reservoirs; to help in maintaining the navigability of rivers; to protect and promote the health,

safety and general welfare of the people."

Forty years later, the staff has grown to six fulltime individuals plus a seven-man board of directors and nine associate directors. They work not only with the control of run off and erosion problems from farming, but with watershed associations, environmental organizations, mine discharge problems, sportsmen groups, landowners and woodland owners with various concerns, and individual homeowners with storm runoff problems.

Education of the youth in environmental concerns has been an ongoing emphasis by the ACD directors and staff. They have gone into the schools to speak about the environment and natural resources. They have involved the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, Americorps, and many school children in a wide variety of projects.

One of their objectives has recently become a reality — "The Crooked Creek Environmental Learning Center — which is available to people of all ages in the county.

Since 1982, Dave Rupert has been the district manager. He was born and raised in Kittanning. He is ably assisted by a staff, considered by many county residents as "one of the finest in Pennsylvania."

Chris Cramer started out as a clerk at ACD in 1974 and, after completing educational requirements, she became the erosion and sediment technician in 1985. She has first hand experience on the growth of the conversation district's work and its many achievements. In summing up the district's environmental interests, she said, "I think Armstrong County is exceptional. We have a lot of people who care."

## Research Needed On Possible Johne's, Human Illness Link

**UNIVERSITY PARK** (Centre Co.) — The possible relationship between a serious cattle disease and a similar human illness suggests the need for more focused research to establish any links, according to a new report from the National Research Council.

The report, "Diagnosis and Control of Johne's Disease," was prepared by a panel of eight experts from across the United States. Lawrence Hutchinson, extension veterinarian and professor of veterinary science in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences, was one of the co-authors.

Johne's disease (pronounced YO-knees) is a bacterial intestinal disease of cattle and other ruminants (sheep, deer, goats) that can cause weight loss, diarrhea and decreased milk production. "Once cattle contract the disease, it's incurable," says Hutchinson. "It's estimated that between 20 and 40 percent of dairy herds in Pennsylvania have cattle with Johne's disease."

Studies have estimated that dairy producers with a 100-cow herd in which at least 10 percent of cull cows show symptoms of Johne's could sustain costs of about \$23,000 per year, mostly due to reduced milk production. This translates into an estimated \$200 million annual loss for dairy producers nationally.

The costs of Johne's disease would expand into the public health arena if researchers were to establish a link between Johne's and Crohn's disease, a chronic intestinal inflammatory illness that affects humans. Symptoms of Crohn's disease include malaise, weight loss, abdo-

minimal pain and diarrhea. Crohn's is a life-long disease, the cause of which is unknown and for which there is no cure.

At issue is whether the pathogen that causes Johne's disease, Mycobacterium avium subspecies paratuberculosis, or Map, is also a cause of Crohn's disease in humans. Studies designed to confirm or refute a link to date have been small and have yielded inconclusive or inconsistent results. The report calls for a new approach to studying the possible relationship between Map and Crohn's disease and for the convening of an independent panel to establish standardized protocols and laboratory methods for research on the question.

The report also spells out steps for controlling Johne's disease, reducing the spread of Map and minimizing effects of the disease in animals. "An integrated, bottom-up approach to on-farm disease control is needed that meets the needs of the livestock producer and motivates behavioral change, with support at broader industry, state and federal levels," the report states.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences, currently sponsors one of the nation's longest-running voluntary Johne's disease monitoring and control programs for livestock producers and veterinarians.

To obtain a copy of "Diagnosis and Control of Johne's Disease," call the National Academies Press toll-free at (888) 624-8373, or visit the Website at <http://www.nap.edu>.

## Pa.'s Drought Ends; Seven Counties Upgraded To Normal

**HARRISBURG**, Dauphin Co.) — Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty recently announced that seven counties on the western edge of Pennsylvania have been upgraded from a drought watch to normal status, putting all 67 Pennsylvania counties in normal drought status for the first time since Aug. 8, 2001.

The seven counties returned to normal status are Beaver, Crawford, Erie, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer and Washington.

While under the drought watch, residents in these counties were asked to reduce water use voluntarily by five percent. A drought watch is the least severe of the levels, alerting the public of the potential for drought and warning water suppliers

to increase monitoring, awareness and preparation for response if conditions worsen.

Recent rains have pushed precipitation to near normal for the region this year, leading to significant recovery of stream flows and groundwater levels. Until recently, the border counties in western Pennsylvania had not been experiencing the wet weather pattern that has affected the rest of the state this spring.

"Last year at this time, most of Pennsylvania was in the throes of one of the worst droughts on record," Secretary McGinty said.

"It has been a long recovery for the western part of the state, but the last remnants of the 2002 drought finally have been erased."

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