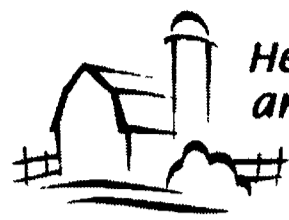


# "Basically" Farming



Helpful hints for new and existing farmers

PENNSYLVANIA



College of Agricultural Sciences  
Cooperative Extension - Southeast Region

## PLANNING AHEAD FOR PASTURE CONVERSION

Mena Hautau  
Berks County  
Cooperative Extension

Producers are looking to convert select acres or whole farms to pasture for intensive grazing, horse production, or livestock and exotic animal production. Before any seed is sown or fence built, here are some items for consideration that should work into a plan of action.

- Evaluate the soil types on the farm. Get ahold of a USDA Soil Survey for your county. Find your farm on the soil map, identify the soils and become aware of the strengths and limitations of your site. Avoid conversion of wetlands to pastures. If the soils are wet or droughty, plan for the grasses and animal traffic patterns adapted to your soil type. Once the total number of acres devoted to pasture is known, the stocking rate, especially the upper limit, can be figured.

- Take a soil test and become knowledgeable about what you need to do to bring soil fertility to optimum production. The need for high soil fertility is relative in the northeastern U.S. But in southeast Pennsylvania, where land values and animal stocking

rates tend to be high, good fertility is needed to have a productive pasture. Soils that have been farmed in rotation for a long time with manure can have medium to very high levels of fertility, especially phosphorous and potassium. Cropland that has a history of renting can have low pH and low fertility. The soil test result will help with the decision to add soil amendments, especially lime, before any seed is planted.

- Know the crop history. A piece of land with an unknown cropping history can hide limitations. If triazine herbicides have been used for corn production, the field may not be able to be seeded. If possible, try to obtain knowledge about the pesticide history from the former operator. The Penn State Agronomy Guide can assist with understanding any herbicide restrictions. Another consideration is noxious, woody or poisonous weeds. They may need to be controlled one year ahead of renovation, especially where these weeds have taken over rented crop ground or old hay stands.

- Fencing and facilities. Plan on paper for any facility and fencing layout before anything is built or rebuilt. Facilities should

be placed away from any streams, wetlands, or wet areas. Manure should not be stored near the well or streams. Home septic mounds should be kept separate from any of the pastured or facility areas.

Lay out paddocks on paper first, and then flag out your permanent fencing lines and laneways to visually see where the fencing and water lines should go. (This also helps to control costs by analyzing feet of fencing or water lines needed.) Ideally, each paddock should be about one acre in size. Lanes should be sized to fit machinery. Finally, barn and fencing contractors should use specific traffic laneways on the farm to prevent rutting or compacting pastures.

- Economics. Are you a producer who is depending on this conversion to increase profitability, or are you a part-time producer who has other income sources? Establish goals and figure out the cost to make the change. Consider dry matter output, winter feed costs, infrastructure costs such as fencing and machinery, and variable costs such as seed. Penn State has several fact sheets on Alternative Agriculture Enterprises that can help with understanding these costs.

### Resources

- USDA Soils Survey: contact your Natural Resource Conservation Service office, Penn State extension office, or county conservation office on how to access the survey.

- Penn State Agronomy Guide: <http://agguide.agronomy.psu.edu/>

- Agronomy Fact Sheet 49: Successful Forage Crop Establishment Go to: <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/forage.html> or contact your local county extension office for a copy.

- Alternative Ag Fact Sheet Series: <http://agalternatives.aers.psu.edu/> or contact your local county extension office.

## Small Farm Expo Sept. 20-21

PHILLIPSBURG, N.J. — The Northeast Small Farm & Rural Living Expo and Garden State Sheep Breeders' Sheep & Fiber Festival is scheduled for Sept. 20-21 at the Warren County Farmers' Fairgrounds, Phillipsburg.

The event will focus on topics pertaining to small farm and rural life, offering 75 educational

workshops, livestock exhibits, lectures and demonstrations, country crafts, a farm market, and entertainment.

The fairgrounds are located along Rt. 519 in Harmony Township, four miles north of Rt. 22.

For more information, call (800) 554-8540 or log onto [www.smallfarmexpo.org](http://www.smallfarmexpo.org).

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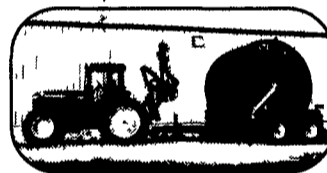


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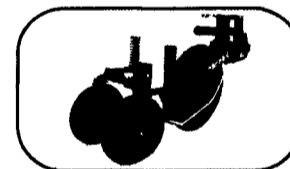
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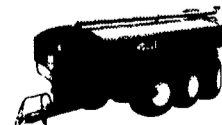
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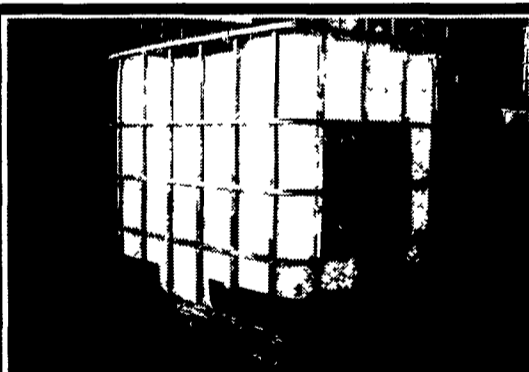
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[www.midatlanticagri.com](http://www.midatlanticagri.com)

Organic dairy production will be a highlight of the Sept. 20 Lancaster Farming Dairy Plus booklet.

Scheduled: features on organic dairy farms and strategies for success in organic milk production from university. In addition, news and information from the breed associations and cooperatives.



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