

Pennsylvania's First Mobile Ag Lab Launched At Ag Progress

DAVE LEFEVER
Lancaster Farming Staff

ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — Gov. Ed Rendell and Pennsylvania ag leaders turned out to "christen" Pennsylvania's new mobile ag education lab Aug. 20 at Progress Days.

The lab-on-wheels is designed to bring exciting and important ag lessons to elementary and middle school students across the state as part of a statewide effort to better educate kids about food and farming.

Those on hand for the kick-off included Pennsylvania Secretary



Ag Secretary Dennis Wolff gives his blessing to the state's new mobile ag lab. Looking on are Carl Shaffer, PFB vice-president, left, and Gov. Rendell, right.

of Agriculture Dennis Wolff and Carl Shaffer, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) vice president.

The Pennsylvania Friends of Agriculture Foundation, associated with PFB, initiated this pilot lab, which will travel to schools in Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and Fulton counties beginning this fall.

The long-term goal is to add more labs across the state within the next several years.

Shaffer delivered a message on the ag lab's significance, speaking in place of Guy Donaldson, PFB president, who was unable to attend the event.

"With fewer and fewer children having a tie to agriculture, we saw a need to help teachers educate more students about the importance of agriculture," Shaffer said.

Tonya Myers, a certified elementary school teacher from Chambersburg, has been hired as a full-time teacher in the ag lab.

In preparation for her new job, Myers has completed Penn State's Ag in the Classroom course. She is responsible for developing the lab's curriculum and 50-minute lesson plans for kids in grades 3 through 7.

Students will participate in numerous science activities designed to help them get a handle on how food is produced, as well as some issues surrounding farming.

Hands-on lessons will have kids making butter, testing the water-holding capacity of soils, germinating seeds, acting as egg inspectors, and learning the basics of genetics and biotechnology, to name a few.

Thousands of Ag Progress Days visitors toured the lab, including Gov. Rendell.

"It's great," said the governor on completing the lab tour.

In his speech prior to the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Rendell noted that agriculture, with 800,000 workers in the state, is Pennsylvania's largest employer. Education is key to keeping the ag industry thriving — for those in agriculture, as well as the public in general, he said.

"This lab is a great step in the right direction," Rendell said.

The goal, he said, is to eventually have eight labs across the state.

According to Myers, the lab will travel from school to school, setting up for a week or more in



Gov. Ed Rendell, right, cuts ribbon marking the official launch of Pennsylvania's first mobile ag lab at Ag Progress Days. Joining him are Carl Shaffer, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau vice president, and Tonya Myers, ag lab teacher.

each place. One district has scheduled the lab for four weeks this fall.

The lab has the potential to educate up to 900 students per week on how agriculture affects our everyday lives.

As of Aug. 20, the lab has been scheduled for about eight weeks in the coming school year, Myers

said, with the goal of booking about 18 weeks total.

"We have openings throughout the year," Myers said.

To learn more about developing ag education science labs, supporting the ag lab, or bringing the ag lab to your local school district, call PFB's Member Relations Division at (717) 761-2740.



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Left to Right Ashley Lynn Chapman, PA Alternate, Raechel Elizabeth Kilgore, PA Dairy Princess; Rachel Lynne Ebert, PA Alternate



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