

Farm Bureau Announces Achievement Award Finalists

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by a panel of judges on a combination of factors, including farm operation growth and financial progress, plus leadership within and outside of Farm Bureau.

The winner of the YF&R Achievement Award, to be announced Tuesday, Nov. 18, will receive a \$500 cash prize from the Dodge division of DaimlerChrysler, 400 hours use of a Kubota tractor, \$500 worth of crop protection products from Syngenta, and lodging and registration at the 2004 Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Leadership Conference. The winner will also travel to the American Farm Bureau convention in Honolulu, Hawaii in January to take part in national competition.

This year's finalists are Matthew and Barbara Balliet of Drums, Luzerne County; Forrest and Jessica Wessner of Germansville, Lehigh County; and Dennis Whitney of Harborcreek, Erie County.

Starting in 1998 with the purchase of a rundown farm in a neighboring county, Matthew Balliet single-handedly operates a 500-acre cash grain enterprise. He grows corn and soybeans, plus some hay and oats for a small herd of custom-raised beef cattle. Having no equipment when he started, over the years Balliet has purchased or customized a complete line of planters, drills, tillage equipment, and trucks. Cropping on the farm is 100 percent no-till.

He converted a potato storage building into a maintenance and equipment repair shed, and added an on-farm grain storage and dryer system. Following last

year's drought, Balliet installed two center-pivot irrigation systems which can cover about one-third of the corn acreage at the home farm.

An active Farm Bureau member, Balliet has served on the Luzerne County Farm Bureau board of directors. He chairs the County Farm Bureau's State Legislative Committee and serves as its National Legislative Spokesman. He and his wife Barbara have served on Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's YF&R State Committee. Balliet also served on a county task force on farmland preservation and is now a member of the county's Agricultural Land Preservation Board. He is a dedicated member and Fire Chief of the Butler Township Fire Department.

Forrest and Jessica Wessner operate a 450-acre potato and hay farm in Lehigh County. They have undertaken many changes during the eight years they've been farming to improve the marketability of their products. Labor-saving changes have also been a major focus in an operation which involves handling 40,000 fifty-pound bags of potatoes and 30,000 bales of hay and straw.

A German-built potato harvester was purchased to improve quality of their tablestock potatoes. Their packing line was expanded and updated and an industrial-size humidifier was installed in their storage facility to maintain potato quality. A traveling irrigation system was purchased following the 1999 drought so the farm's entire potato acreage could be covered.

For their hay business, a hay drying barn was constructed to

cure the hay with warm air, producing a differentiated, quality product which has proven to be popular with their horse-owner customers. A second baler was added and a large 80-foot X 40-foot building was constructed to provide quality hay storage.

Wessner is a member of the Lehigh County Farm Bureau Board of Directors and serves on its State Legislative Committee. He is also active in the Lehigh County Potato Growers Association. Jessica has served on the Lehigh County Cooperative Extension board and the county 4-H board.

Dennis Whitney operates a 120-acre grape vineyard and apple orchard on the shores of Lake Erie. A member of the National Grape Cooperative Association, Dennis grows Concord and Niagara grapes for processing into juice and jams at a nearby

Welch's plant. He also grows some Catawba grapes and French hybrid varieties for area winemakers. A few acres of the farm have been converted to trellised apple trees for pick-your-own sales.

Since taking over from his father in 1993, Dennis has undertaken an extensive overhaul of the entire operation. He rejuvenated existing vineyards, planted 20 more acres of grapes on his property and leased additional acreage from other farms. He has also renovated aging equipment and buildings. A 40-foot X 60-foot structure was constructed for off-season equipment storage and to centralize harvest operations. A custom harvesting business has been established with neighboring grape farmers.

Dennis has been active in the Erie County Farm Bureau, serving as Governmental Relations

Director and membership co-chairman. He is also a member of the PFB YF&R State Committee. He has served as an alternate delegate for his grape cooperative and serves on the County Horticulture Board. He has also held leadership roles with the Boy Scouts and Civil Air Patrol.

Farmers from across the state will take part in the PFB Annual Meeting at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, Nov. 17 - 19. Voting Delegates from 54 county Farm Bureaus will elect leaders and chart policy positions for the statewide organization for the coming year. PFB represents about 34,000 farm and rural families in 54 county organizations. It is part of the world's largest organization of farmers and ranchers, the 5.3-million member American Farm Bureau Federation.

Geneva Experiment Station Increases Its Capacity For Field Research

GENEVA, N.Y. — The New York State Agricultural Experiment Station has added the 75-acre Gates Farm to the 730 acres of available research land being used by the station for field trials. The additional land will allow the implementation of a new crop rotation schedule and insure the integrity of field trials at the station.

"It is vital that we continue our efforts to provide high-quality research facilities for our faculty and staff, thus allowing them to

continue to provide the best information on fruit and vegetable crop production and protection," said Bob Seem, associate director of the experiment station.

The Gates Farm will be divided between fruit and vegetable research. Some of the fruit field space will allow the station's highly successful apple breeding program to expand under the leadership of Professor Susan Brown, while 15 acres are part of a study run by Professor George Abawi on soil health.

The farm was purchased from Rosalie Kneut in 2001, and is located on Gates Road in Geneva, NY, contiguous with the Station's Robbins and Lucey Farms. The Station's Field Research Unit, managed by Mark Scott, more than 2,000 man-hours improving the farm's infrastructure to meet the needs of station scientists. Improvements include access roads, a surface water management system, underground irrigation lines, deer fence and subsurface drainage, bringing the cost of the farm to \$400,000.

Lancaster County Hires Dairy Agent

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would be selected out of about 15 applicants for the position.

"He has a very strong science and teaching background," Ressler said. "Most importantly, he has a strong farm background, having grown up on a

farm. He's very interested in getting back on farms (after his teaching stint in Illinois)."

Beth Grove will continue to serve as Lancaster County dairy agent for smaller farms, while Griswold will focus on larger operations.

Griswold said his first priority

will be to "meet as many people as possible" to learn about the Lancaster County dairy industry.

He said he is looking forward to settling down in the area with his wife Beth (originally from Philadelphia), and daughter Julie, 10 months.

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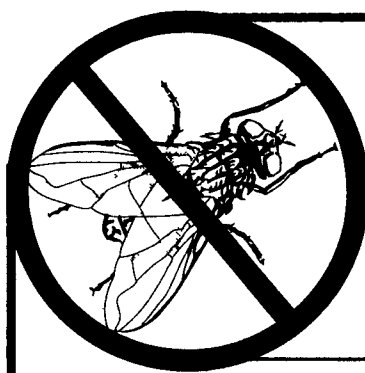
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