

IN THIS ISSUE...

Westmoreland County's landscape is a complex and delicate mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. Nestled among family farms and lush forests are numerous small towns and deep wood retreats. Farmland is arguably the single most important element in the make-up of our landscape. For it is farmland soil that provides our food and fiber, the farmland settings that gives us a pastoral sense of "breathing room" and contentment, and most importantly, farmland economy that helps to fuel our number one industry - agriculture. Many of these amenities also help to attract new businesses to the region and each arrival bears fruit in the form of jobs. Jobs for people and money for the economy.

We are proud of the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board and their staff for their outstanding farmland preservation accomplishments. Their accomplishments are many and remarkable especially when you consider that the program was conceived in 1990. This issue of "Landmarks" is dedicated to their efforts. Take time to read a special message from Secretary of Agriculture Boyd Wolff. Discover what is prime farmland in an article by Wes Gordon, and Learn about Clean and Green with Betty Reefer. Also featured in this edition are articles on tree farming, the Cooperative Extension Service, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of "Landmarks". If you want to help with farmland preservation, lend your voice in support, volunteer your time for the cause, or donate resources to help establish more easements on the ground - right here at home - in Westmoreland County.



Protecting and Promoting Pennsylvania Agriculture

by Boyd E. Wolff, Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture

When I graduated from Penn State in 1953 there were 135,000 farms in Pennsylvania. When I was sworn in as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Agriculture in 1987 there were only 56,000 farms left. In three and a half decades, we lost nearly 80,000 farms and 6 million acres of farmland.

In many areas, where people struggle to create new jobs, the loss of farmland has been bittersweet because land lost to development fell to progress and economic activity. Unfortunately, farmland is a nonrenewable resource. When cropland is taken for development, it is lost forever. I can't cite a case where houses were torn down so that corn could be planted. A new report by the American Farmland Trust claims suburban growth threatens land that produces more than half the nation's food supply.

Of all the farm issues that demand attention, farmland protection stands out as one that promises obvious benefits for future generations. If we can save Pennsylvania's productive farms, we will be saving a food production system that forms the basis for the high quality of life in our Commonwealth.

I am proud to report that Pennsylvania's farmland preservation effort now permanently protects over 41,000 acres on 328 farms. In addition, more than 2-million acres have been enrolled into Agricultural Security Areas, the first step toward permanent protection under Pennsylvania's program.

As a Westmoreland County native, I am particularly happy that the first approved easement purchase program in the southwestern part of the Commonwealth was from Westmoreland County. The County recognized that conversion of farmland to other uses was a problem and reacted by joining the state's program in 1991. To date, three county farms that include 460 acres have been permanently saved, and more farms are being prepared for recommendation to the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board this year. The county has hired staff to work on the easement program. The county's \$50,000 farmland preservation expenditure attracted a match of \$114,795 in state funding this year. With the addition of unused funds from other counties from previous years, the size of the Westmoreland

County program mushroomed to \$745,000 in the current year.

The Department has also taken bold new steps to protect animal, plant and human health. The Pennsylvania Animal Health Commission began meeting in 1989. The Commission has established a new tripartite laboratory system that efficiently marries the diagnostic resources of the Department of Agriculture, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center. A new \$6.7 million state animal health laboratory has been approved and is in the architectural design stage.

In an age when our nation is fretting over a negative balance of trade with foreign nations, I can report that exports of agricultural products from Pennsylvania increased another 15 percent last year and have more than doubled since 1987. We have taken aggressive new actions on the domestic market development front as well. By now most of us have seen Pennsylvania agriculture's new logo, "Pennsylvania Pride, Quality From Our Home To Yours".

Food safety efforts in Pennsylvania have never been stronger. Fifteen additional food

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KATHY'S KIDS KORNER
 by Kathy Fritz

Farmland Word Find

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 I T A T T Z D A T O N B R F N G E
 E A L H K E I N E L L I S F A U E
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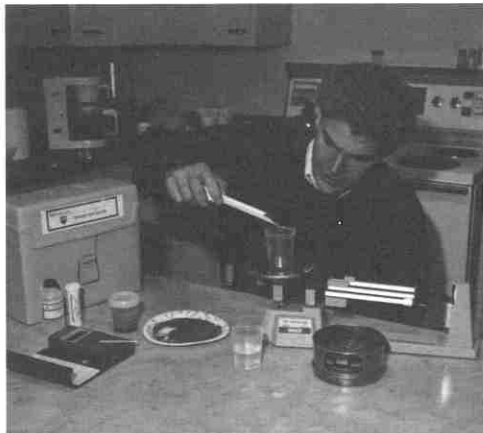
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- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
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| Duroc | Dorset |
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| HORSES | COWS |
| Mustang | Limousin |
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| Clydesdale | Angus |
| Percheron | Hereford |
| Tennessee Walker | Holstein |
| Morgan | Ayrshire |
| CHICKENS | Guernsey |
| Rhode Island Red | Shorthorn |
| White Leghorn | Charolais |
| Barred Rock | Simmental |
| Cornish | |

Delivering Knowledge to Your Doorstep



Penn State County Extension Agent, Gary Sheppard, conducts a nitrogen quick-test on a local soil sample.

by Gary Sheppard
 Penn State Cooperative Extension Service

Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences is more than you think. The Westmoreland Extension Office is your local contact with this resource. Extension programs bring research on a wide variety of topics to your door step. Though the name implies agriculture, our equal opportunity, affirmative action programs educate people with a variety of needs. Over 150 learning projects are available

through the 4-H program. Locally, 500 leaders help 3,000 youth complete these projects. A 4-H member might learn how to talk in public, budget a livestock enterprise or take a quality picture.

Parenting, food handling, budgeting or retirement planning are examples of topics family living agents teach. The Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program staff teach low income residents how to prepare nutritious meals on tight budgets. New technology in agriculture creates questions in the minds of food consumers. Extension provides research information to help people make informed decisions.

Agricultural agents deal with items of concern to both the farm and non-farm community. The safe and appropriate use of pesticides by home owners and farmers is an example. Master Gardeners, extension trained volunteers, answer home gardening questions. For farmers, extension programs present research from the country's land grant Universities. This is done through seminars, personal help, newsletters, and the mass media. In addition, services like soil testing, plant tissue analysis, plant and animal disease diagnosis or insect and weed identification, help farmers fine tune their management practices. Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences is more than you think.

LANDMARKS

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Sharing a concern for resource conservation through the support of this publication.

For information on Landmarks Sponsorship Rates call the Westmoreland Conservation District at 837-5271

INVOLVE YOURSELF! JOIN US AT DISTRICT MEETINGS

The Westmoreland Conservation District is administered by a Board composed of five farmer directors, three public directors, and one County commissioner. The Board convenes at least once a month to plan, prioritize, and supervise the implementation of programs. **Regular meetings are scheduled at 8:00 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month, and held at the Peoples Natural Gas Company in Greensburg.**

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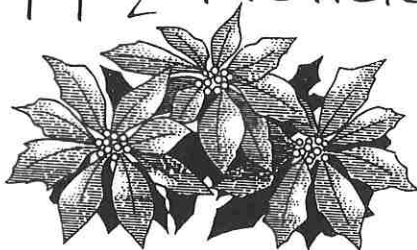


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*from The Board and Staff of
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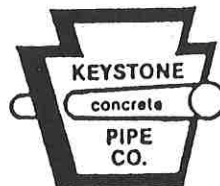
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PRIME FARMLAND

by Wes Gordon, District Conservationist



Call the District Office 837-5271, if you can identify the owner of this farmstead.

Does part of your lawn or garden grow better even though you treat all the area the same? Many farmers will tell you that a certain field or portion of a field will produce better crops even with uniform management. You can probably find the reason by looking below the surface... to the soil itself. Soils differ greatly and some soils are just naturally more productive than others.

Land that is best suited to producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops is considered Prime Farmland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says to qualify as a prime farmland a soil must have an adequate supply of moisture, favorable soil temperature, acceptable permeability rate, favorable pH (before soil amendments) and be free of toxic

Promoting and Protecting Pennsylvania Agriculture continued from page 1

inspectors are on the job, permitting the Department to conduct 10,000 new inspections. Those efforts protect consumers and help guard the hard-earned reputation for quality that buyers associate with our products.

The Department's new CHEMSWEEP Program permits producers to properly dispose of farm chemicals that are no longer needed, obsolete, deteriorated, or have been banned. In its first two years, CHEMSWEEP is serving growers in 13 Pennsylvania counties. The one-time collection program will ultimately serve growers statewide.

As you can see, the Department's efforts are diverse and innovative. The common thread is that these programs and activities are all aimed at promotion and protection of Pennsylvania's farmers and the consumers who benefit from their products. ■

materials. In addition the land must be free of frequent flooding, be level to gently sloping, contain no serious erosion hazards and no rock fragments in the surface layer that would restrict cultivation.

From all those criteria you might expect that we are talking about land in the middle of Iowa. It is true that the Corn Belt contains a large amount of prime farmland, but land in Westmoreland County also qualifies. Some cases in point; the land on the east side of Rt. 711 South just across Loyalhanna Creek from Fort Ligonier is considered prime farmland. Areas along the Loyalhanna Creek around Latrobe and New Alexandria, and fields adjacent to Sewickley Creek are prime farmland soils. So-called "bottom land" is not all that would be considered as prime. The gently sloping areas of cropland fields behind the truck stops at the Smithton exit are prime farmlands. Many areas of our county contain prime farmland soils.

Prime farmland when treated and managed with modern farming methods can produce crops nearly continuously without degrading the environment. This land is the most responsive to management while requiring less energy and investment to maximize productivity. Quite simply, prime farmland is more productive than non-prime farmland.

Because these soils are deep, well drained, free of large amounts of stone, and occur on gently sloping to flat terrain, they are also well suited to non-agricultural uses. Land that is the best for farming is also good for housing, commercial/industrial development, high construction, etc. It is estimated that about one-third of all Pennsylvania

agricultural land converted to other uses is prime farmland. The acreage of our best farmland, particularly in the Northeast is finite. As the best land is lost to non-agricultural uses, more marginal land is brought into production. These marginal lands are more erosive, less productive, and demand more energy to farm and are generally more restrictive.

It is important to identify, monitor and preserve these important farmland areas within the nation, the state, and yes — within Westmoreland County.

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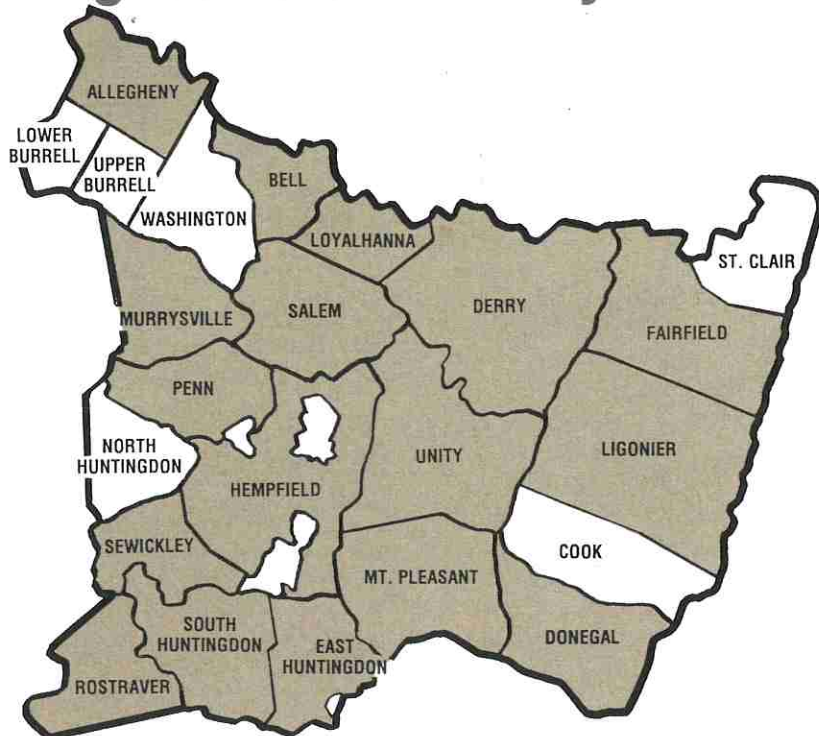
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Jamison Sheep Farm Recognized

Wes Gordon, District Conservationist, Soil Conservation Services, right, poses with John and Sukie Jamison under the newly erected sign recognizing Jamison Sheep Farm for outstanding work in intensive grazing systems. The Jamisons have been utilizing crop rotation grazing practices for nearly 10 years on their 100 acre Unity Twp. farm.

Agricultural Security Areas



Interested In ASA?

Landowners who are not currently enrolled in an Agricultural Security Area, may still petition their Township Supervisors to include their land in the program. ASA's entitle a landowner to:

- Protection from nuisance ordinances that affect normal farming operations.
- The right to additional protection from land condemnation.
- Landowners become eligible for consideration of conservation easements through the state-wide farmland protection program.

Agricultural Security Areas have been adopted in seventeen townships in Westmoreland County, protecting 77,141 acres. Please contact the Farmland Preservation Office for more details at **837-5271**.

Municipalities	Acres
Allegheny Township	2,729
Bell Township	3,188
Derry Township	10,153
Donegal Township	1,011
East Huntingdon Township	4,952
Fairfield Township	5,147
Hempfield Township	3,959
Ligonier Township	9,699
Loyalhanna Township	1,563
Mt. Pleasant Township	5,233

Municipalities	Acres
Murrysville	2,907
Penn Township	3,375
Rostraver Township	2,394
Salem Township	3,797
Sewickley Township	4,866
South Huntingdon Township	5,515
Unity Township	5,960
TOTAL ACRES in Agricultural Security Areas	77,141

"Clean and Green" - A Way to Reduce Your Taxes

by Betty Reefer
Farmland Preservation Specialist

The future of farming in Westmoreland County is dependent on farmers finding an economical way to continue production. The Westmoreland County Farmland Preservation Program has taken on the task of working to find long-term protection of our vital farmland, in part, by providing the information necessary for farmers to use existing programs.

Many farmers are unaware of some of the special laws in Pennsylvania designed to minimize property tax burdens on farms. In 1974, Pennsylvania signed into law the Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act. This act (Act 319) commonly known as the "Clean & Green Act", permits preferred assessment of farm and forest land. This preserves the land by taxing according to its use value, rather than the prevailing market prices.

The voluntary program requires a minimum of 10 acres remain in a specific designated use - agricultural use, agricultural reserve, or forest reserve. The average tax reduction in Westmoreland County in 1989, as reported in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's 1989 summary of results, showed a 64% decrease in the assessed value of farmland.

Clean & Green is administered by the Westmoreland County Tax Assessment Office, where potential participants may obtain information and application forms. Applications must be submitted on or before June 1 of the year immediately preceding the tax year.



You Can Be a Part of Our Efforts to Preserve Our County's Most Vital Land

Gain the satisfaction of knowing that Westmoreland County's precious agricultural areas will remain for future generations.

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IN THE FIELD



Programs for Our Agricultural Producers

by John Lohr, *Executive Director ASCS*

The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, administers farm commodity, conservation, environmental protection and emergency programs. ASCS goals include stabilization of the nation's agricultural economy, conservation of farm resources and protection of food and feed reserves.

ASCS got its start as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration when the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1939 was signed into law. The Act provided some production controls and authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to establish local farmer-elected committees. These committees administer the programs and activities of ASCS at the county level.

ASCS's Agricultural Conservation Program provides cost sharing to producers who want to control erosion and improve water quality through practices such as stripcropping, seeding, control of water runoff, conservation tillage, and construction

of animal waste facilities. The Conservation Reserve Program offers long-term rental payments and cost sharing to establish permanent covers on highly erodible cropland or cropland contributing to serious water quality problems. Other ASCS conservation programs include the Forestry Incentive Program to assist with tree planting and timber production, and the Emergency Conservation Program to repair damage to farmland caused by natural disasters.

The Food Security Act of 1985 and the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 included provisions aimed at discouraging the conversion of wetlands or highly erodible land for agricultural production. Producers who fail to comply with these provisions will be ineligible for most of the programs administered by ASCS.

ASCS also provides programs for wheat and feed grain production adjustment and price support, and as an incentive for wool producers to improve quality and quantity. Milk production control, livestock feed assistance, and crop disasters are also covered by ASCS programs.

Make Your Farm a Tree Farm

by Tony Quadro

- ✦ A Tree Farm is a privately owned forest dedicated to producing renewable crops of forest products while protecting the soil, water, range, aesthetic, recreation, wood, fish and wildlife resources.
- ✦ To be certified as a Tree Farm, landowners must have at least ten acres of forest land and have a written management plan jointly approved by the landowner and a qualified forester. (A Stewardship Plan is also acceptable.)
- ✦ Tree farmers must participate in a reinspection process every five years to update their records and recertify their properties.
- ✦ Certified tree farmers receive a Tree Farm certificate and sign, and are invited to field days, study tours, conferences, and seminars on forestry related topics. They also receive regular mailings of Tree Farmer magazine. The magazine is free for the first year, with an annual fee thereafter.
- ✦ If you are interested in making your farm a "Tree Farm", call forester Tony Quadro at the Westmoreland Conservation District office.

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