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“When Farmers Get Together...”

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Keep Farming First '09

including the

First Farm-Centered Community Conversation

“When Farmers Get Together...”

Alternative energy and energy conservation were front and center at *Keep Farming First* on February 21, 2009 at Octorara High School. Farmers and non-farmers alike, 150 of them, attended the seventh edition of the long-running farm summit that focuses on support for Chester County’s farm economy. They were welcomed by school board president Duane Hershey and then Kathi Cozzone for the Chester County Commissioners who served as the Honorary Co-Chairs of the event. KFF was created in 2003 by a partnership that includes Chester County 2020, Chester County Economic Development Council, Penn State Cooperative Extension-Chester County, and Chester County Agricultural Development Council – each one with a commitment to the preservation of farming in this region of internationally recognized high quality soils and plentiful rainfall.

Annually, recognition is given to Century Farmers, families with histories of more than 100 years on their county farms. Chester County officially lists four Bicentennial Farms (200 years on the same farm) and 33 Century Farms. There are likely additional eligible farms that should be registered to become part of this proud heritage. Also acknowledged were Congressman Joe Pitts and State Representative Duane Milne who commented on the importance of a healthy farm economy that supports the Buy Fresh, Buy Local efforts. Recently retired State Representative Art Hershey introduced the keynote speaker, Penn State Professor of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Dennis Buffington.

Professor Buffington addressed the farmers’ future in terms of the Economic, Environmental, and Social Challenges –referred to as the “3-D Bottom Line.” He emphasized the importance of balancing these elements for a healthy farm economy. Farms must be profitable or the next generation isn’t going to be able to continue farming as a livelihood. And it isn’t just the farmer who makes the determinations; good off-farm but related business practices are part of the balance, saving money and improving the environment. He mentioned Wegman’s and John Deere in that category and how best management practices (BMPs) have been important to Chesapeake Bay improvements while helping the farmers to be good neighbors. In return, Professor Buffington reminded the audience, in relation to the good neighbor aspect if a farmer’s operation is in compliance with the BMPs there should never be punitive action against the operation. Neighborliness flows in both directions.

The speaker challenged his listeners to consider their roles in dealing with the most critical issues facing both the United States and the global economy: Energy, Global Climate Change, and Water Quantity and Quality. He encouraged them to pick the low-hanging fruit as far as energy conservation is concerned. In his opinion, the two most practical options are careful choices of fuel for heating and cooling and looking for energy efficiency in every appliance purchase and building plan. Geothermal technology is making progress. Wind and solar alternatives depend on location, and the remaining technology is still far from everyday-budget-available while special attention should be paid to the upcoming expiration of the electricity rate caps. And, as a final reminder, *“The greenest energy is the*

energy that is not used because of an effective energy management program.” Everyone should be able to make a commitment to that!

Two blocks of breakout sessions, one morning and one afternoon, featured experts and peers sharing information, introduced new opportunities to sustain traditional farming, and reminded the participants of the importance of agriculture in a county where farmland preservation enjoys dramatic public-private cooperation. The noontime farm-centered Community Conversation facilitated by Chester County 2020, When Farmers Get Together, addressed solutions for important farm issues. The closing panel dealt with Unintentional Impacts of Local Regulations and probably could have continued for a second hour. Speakers included a member of the State House of Representatives, a township manager, dairy and mushroom farmers and the directors of the Conservation District and the Agricultural Development Council who discussed a host of issues and urged more effective communication among everyone involved with and affected by agricultural activities.

All the meals – breakfast, lunch and reception – expressed support for Buy Fresh, Buy Local, in which everyone can participate, year round. Many of the items on the menu and the prize baskets were supplied as in-kind donations. A streaming video from the summit was available for a limited time at www.MainStreetLivePA.com The partners already look forward to the 10th anniversary of KFF, in February 2010 and welcome program suggestions at info@CC202.org Remember, everyone has a stake in the future of farming; every Keep Farming First is a learning day.

“When Farmers Get Together...”

When farmers get together, they really do like to talk to one another for, more normally, visiting time is in short supply. At last year’s Keep Farming First, even though the sessions were popular we also received several requests for more talk time. So – here was the compromise, a session combining talk with productivity. This was a relatively informal Conversation, departing from the usual assigned groups. However, the majority of the breakout groups were a combination of friends and people who did not know one another – creating diversity and opportunities for lively discussion.

In each KFF folder, there was a list of issues that might be discussed or expanded. The breakout groups were asked to pick a topic and then follow the outline on the worksheet and final report form to guide discussion and the search for solutions. The goal is to find a solution that your group 1) can agree about and 2) figure out how to get there. Unlike Chester County 2020’s more usual four-hour Conversations, there wasn’t enough time for each group to present its report. In the place of the verbal reports, here is a summary for each chosen topic, with the input in several cases being from as many as three groups. No one knows more than the farmers themselves about the regional challenges they face, so here are their thoughts and solutions.

The basic issue list was generated by members of the KFF’09 committee and drawn also from the surveys and comments received after the ’08 summit. Several discussion issues were drawn from the list, while others are a combination of more than single issue. Where more than one group chose the same issue, the responses were combined.

- Jobs available but scarcity of farm labor
- Where alternative energy “works” for the farmer; what will make it an acceptable investment?
- Municipality-farmer understanding and cooperation
- Who are the next generation farmers? How do you get them on board?
- Adopting environmentally sound farm practices
- Small farm profitability
- Retention of farm services
- Balancing the benefits of expansion with improved land and water stewardship
- Farmers as good neighbors
- Regulations designed for the large operations too often penalize the smaller ones
- Ability to be recognized as the “farm community,” no matter what the crop or activity may be or whether the approach is traditional, sustainable or organic, or how many acres are involved.

- All land under preservation, including the county program or donated conservation easements held by the land trusts, should be considered farmland.
- Educating non-farm residents about the importance and reality of farming activities
- Few farmers make a living by farming alone; role and allowing of secondary businesses on the farm.
- Costs of starting a new farm

The chosen issues were:

Environmental Action
Next Generation Farmers
Small Farm profitability
Legislative Action
Farmers and Community Relation
Farming's Identity
Agricultural Land Preservation



Regional and Local Trends, listed by discussion issue

Environmental Action

- Increased interest in fencing livestock out of the streams
- Riparian reforestation that was truly “reforestation” rather than single lines of trees
- Serious attention to prospects for on-farm energy efficiency.

Next generation farmers

- Cost for new entrants is prohibitive.
- Most consumers are at least 2 generations away from having any direct connection with agriculture.
- Lack of profitability plus long hours act as a deterrent to the next generation, young farmers.
- State and federal agencies and colleges are too oriented to commodity agriculture and not enough focus on the farmers’ need analysis.
- Many young people today have too little work ethic, are too accustomed to affluence

Small farm profitability

- Rising price of land

Legislative Action

- More evidence of legislator response to farm organization visits to D.C. and Harrisburg
- Direct discussion of farm-based Issues with legislators

Farmers and Community Relations

- Loss of education about farming and food in the school curriculum
- Good representation to support farming efforts
- Infrastructure: residential development pressure
- Regional and local population growth
- Growing housing communities impacting farms
- Farm expansion treated as development re permitting
- Complaints by non-farming community: odors, farming practices
- Investment in open space by federal, state, county, and township levels
- Farm operations not as family centered, therefore not as much of a community

Farming's Identity

- Buy fresh, buy local: these proponents disparage our large scale farms who supply most of the food commodities for the U.S and world

- Pressure from developers (retail and residential)
- Residential follows retail: pressure from location
- Residential developments
- Township zoning (agricultural zones, commercial, industrial, and residential)
- Farmer's own attitude about farming and future
- County's own perception of itself as a farm community rather than a bedroom community

Agricultural Land Preservation

- Building/ development has generated interest in preservation
- Acceptance of fiscal responsibility to preserve land
- Township/ county/ residential citizens directly connected to farmers because of proximity/interface
- Diminished access to farmland for purchase or rental
- Gobbling up land with developments and "open space" that no longer can be farmed

Values

Environmental Action

- Good land stewardship, reasonable cost connected with solutions
- The prospect of making a good living on the farm at the same time that the operation has environmental integrity.

Next Generation Farmers

- Reconnection with agriculture for consumers
- Agriculture as a respected career.
- Connecting available farmland with farmers producing crops that respond to the size and demand of the local markets.
- Creating local, sustainable food sources
- Available land to meet the demand
- Farming as a viable business with multiple product lines
- Improved energy efficiency and production
- Work ethic
- Flexibility
- Give and take
- Word of mouth

Small Farm profitability

(none listed)

Legislative Action

Support for local farming operations

Farmers and Community Relations

- Importance of farming and existence
- Educating non-farm residents about the importance and reality of farming activities
- Open ground
- Farms and farming to be preserved
- Preservation of high quality farmland
- Locally produced high quality food
- Sustaining farmers and agriculture so that they can be profitable enough to sustain a way of life (retirement money/ 401.k and healthcare) just like other carriers/ people
- The farming community itself as a network
- The relationship between farmers and the non-farming community

Farming's Image

- Conservation by everyone
- Cooperation among all types and sizes of agriculture
- Sustainability
- Not squandering natural resources
- Organic produce
- Environmental stewardship
- Preservation of natural and pastoral land
- Preserving soils

Agricultural Land Preservation

- All agricultural land should be treated equally: farmland, conserved land, land-trusts, etc.
- Viability of agriculture
- Having neighbors who understand and support agriculture
- Smart growth
- Sensible zoning
- Preserving heritage, history, and farmlands
- Openness to all opinions: dialogue between new folks and established farmers
- Connecting farmers to the community
- The freedom to grow healthy food and make a profit



Combining the input about the Preferred Future

A reliable future for farming in Chester County and elsewhere depends upon uniting the elements that contribute to that future. No segment of farming stands alone, while unity of goals and methods will lead to shared success. Every farmer can discover preferred future elements that connect with personal and business goals. In every group the list of important players is lengthy; the simplest category would be “everyone” – farmers; residents/consumers; service providers; federal, state, county and local officials; legislators; environmental non-profits; educators; farm-centered organizations such as the Farm Bureau, the Grange, 4-H, FFA.

Environmental Action: Preferred Future

- Establishment of improved environmental practices for farmland along streams. The direct environmental benefits would include
 - Improved stream quality.
 - Saving energy would benefit the environment, save money and result in more bottom line profit.

The **barriers**:

- Difficulty/cost of stewardship practices, especially riparian
- Buffer maintenance
- Infrastructure costs

Ways to **cooperate**:

- Neighbors willing to discuss problems and find solution
- Local community could create a volunteer invasive clean-up for riparian areas.
- Shared investment by energy service companies and grant incentives

Incentives:

- Funding for stewardship maintenance of riparian areas
- Government involvement

Action items:

- Take ideas back to the farm organizations for a start

- Co-generation:
 - Mushroom heating and cooling leading to methane production
 - Produce electricity from excess heat, for instance, from steel production

Next Generation Farmers: Preferred Future

- Apprenticeships
- Business internships
- Encouraging, mentoring youth as prospective farmers
- Ag in the classroom
- Early on-site, hands-on experiences
- Available land
- Young people choosing farming as a challenging, innovative business
- Language programs to make it easier to work with the Latino population

The **barriers** include:

- Lack of central source to serve as a information hub for farmers
- Absence of available land
- Lack of affordable, if not free, estate planning and transitional consultation for farmers: goal creation of successful farm transition
- Need for a training/ mentoring program that provides farmland at the end of successful time period (with financial assistance)
- High land costs
- Top policy makers in U.S.D.A., Penn State Ag
- Non-farming landowners reluctant to lease land
- Low prestige of farming in eyes of teens
- Jobs are available but there is a scarcity of farm labor
- Language
- Immigration papers
- Generation gap
- Successfully keeping the next generation on the farm

Ways to get around the barriers include:

- Highlight technology used by farmers
- “Food focus”
- Success stories on T.V and in schools: good public relations, marketing of farming as a lifestyle and career.
- Profitability
- Apprenticeships for willing non-farmers
- Cooperatives
- Involvement of public, private, and non-profits needed
- Land trust can connect people wanting farmland with landowners

Small Farm Profitability: Preferred Future

Small farms supporting themselves without the necessity to work off farms

- More cooperative-based farmers markets where you do not need to make a commitment to being there on a given day or to be present to market your products. The co-op does this.

The major **barriers**:

- Land costs
- Rising taxes
- Marketing
- Cost of running equipment (fuel)

Getting around the barriers:

- Incentives for purchasing land for farming or to encourage landowners to rent land to farmers

Action items:

- Develop tax incentives.
- Make low-cost alternative energy sources available.

Legislative Action

- Lower taxes to help farmers keep on farming
- More farm land preserved
- Profitable farms

The direct **benefits** would include:

- Lower operating costs
- Farming can become more viable

The major **barriers**:

- County has no County Commissioners with farming background.
- Suburban residents have too little understanding about and respect for hard working farmers.

Getting around the barriers:

- Elect farmers
- Lower assessments
- New, added categories of assessment
- Tax credit incentives for farmers
- Join the Farm Bureau



Farmers and Community Relations: Preferred Future

- More interaction between farming and non-farming community members
- Friendly, understanding neighbors
- Agriculture taught in schools: where does food come from?
- Education of non-farmers
- Place for farmers to meet informally and talk and stay connected
- Lower taxes to free up more money for reinvestment (capital or otherwise)
- Land should stay open
- Access to government funding for small farms
- CSA's
- Specialty crops or higher value crops on smaller acres
- Spokespeople to promote the concerns/ issues

The direct benefits would include:

- Better understanding of farming
- Farmland remains in farming because of economic viability
- Taxes stabilize
- Local food production results in less expensive availability
- Continuous, safe, local food chain
- A decreased carbon footprint
- Maintaining important farmlands for future high quality of life
- Appreciation of the sights, sounds, and seasons of farm life
- Viable farms
- Understanding between farmers and non-farming community: mutual respect

The **barriers**:

- Lack of resources
- Apathy
- Uninformed residents
- Third-hand communications/rumors

Getting around the barriers:

- Get classes about farming and food into the classroom
- Take a farmer into city schools
- Farm city week
- Township meetings
- Opportunities for informal, face to face meetings
- Cultivate new opportunities and support each other
- Classes
- Penn State- teacher certification requirement to understand farming
- All levels of government, community, organizations, business, etc. need to understand the importance of farming
- City and country need to visit each others' locales
- Listening to each other
- Understanding all issues and aspects related to farming: consequences and benefits to community
- Merit/rewards system with schools
- Scout programs
- Reputation
- Tying farmland preservation and farming activities to quality of life issues
- Consideration of favorable land use issues
- Consideration of environmental contributions of ag lands

Action items:

- Community outreach
- City visit farm, farm visit city
- Make sure government officials maintain the Right to Farm Act; don't let farmers lose rights
- Provide information to new residents before it's too late
- Establish programs to help general public to understand/communicate with farmers.

Farming's Identity/ Image: Preferred Future

- All types of farming able to make a profit
- Cooperation among all facets of agriculture
- Ability to be recognized as the "farming community" no matter what the crop activity may be, how many acres there are, or whether the farm is traditional, organic, or sustainable
- More CSAs
- Diversity of crops
- Increase in farm land, more acreage locally in cultivation
- Developers reserve open space for community farming
- Residential subdivisions where homeowners grow their own food, back to Victory Garden
- Fewer regulations
- The Grange supports all types and sizes of agriculture

The **benefits** include:

- United front of agriculture vs. anti-groups
- Fewer malls, more open space
- Healthy lifestyle : more physical activity and less stress
- More nutritious food

The **barriers**:

- Rhetoric: each township defines agriculture differently
- Higher taxes as the result of residential development
- Zoning
- Belief that you need to own land to farm; "last one in" phenomenon
- Desire for land by everyone
- Resident and municipal attitudes

- Suburban/ commuter image of community
- Property tax is too high but legislators cannot agree on a solution

Getting around the barriers:

- Multi-municipal planning
- Discussion among farm groups
- Change tax structure to income tax: why do we pay school tax on open land?
- Show how money can be made
- Lower property tax
- Prices reflect cost of production
- Townships preserve more land by deed restrictions
- Education
- Taxes different for farmers (shift from property tax to income)
- Work with townships and state
- Zoning and municipal changes
- Stakeholders to promote change

Agricultural Land Preservation: Preferred Future

- More understanding
- Preservation of farmland continues as high priority, or else housing will cover fertile land and we will have no place to grow food
- Renewable, healthy farms and produce
- Farms respected and valued by neighbors
- Regulation in such a way that *all* farms (large and small) remain competitive and profitable
- Focus on management and business side for success
- Resources/ agencies come together to provide for farmers
- Stop wasting land on “open space” that isn’t farmed

The **benefits** include:

- We can live together more peacefully
- More farmers and less stupid people
- Preserving our agricultural heritage while renewing and expanding local agricultural enterprises
- Education at a young age

The **barriers**:

- Over development
- Public perception of sounds, smells, and other farm activities
- Taxes on farm property: Delaware gives farms lower taxes
- Farm equipment mostly manufactured overseas
- Mistrust between the farming and non-farming communities
- Lack of understanding of farming industry and where products come from
- Regulations
- Farm animal zoning (i.e. you need a bunch of acres before you can have a chicken!)

Getting around the barriers:

- Fewer/ Lower taxes
- More education of neighbors
- Educate students in school as to where food comes from
- Bring exhibits into schools, take kids on field trips to farms
- Get people together
- Communication: since so many of interface problems are with new residents, extend education and programs outside of the community
- Educate township board members
- Educate the community as to the safety and nutritious quality of tasty local food.
- Encourage pride in farming for the farm kids; they are not proud today

- Increase use of the transfer of development rights
- If you have open space and farmland you pay less tax
- Teachers need to be better educated about farming in the region.
- Regulators need to be trained about farming needs and practices
- More public awareness of farm dilemma and loss of farmland
- Zoning to keep farm land intact
- Communication and listening to other viewpoints

Ways to **cooperate**:

- Encourage regulators to enlist more input from farmers
- Buy fresh, buy local
- CSA's are excellent opportunities
- Farmers introduce themselves to the community
- Lend someone a few acres, barter for products in return instead of money
- Healthy community needs diversity: we need farms and houses and the infrastructure to support them both
- Farmers need to speak out
- Public needs to understand the value of farm land
- Education of adults, policymakers, and in schools

Action items:

- Revise tax system- very few legislatures have farm legislators
- More community forums and televised local access
- Public service announcements regarding farming
- Have schools buy more local food
- Encourage schools to have gardens where students can learn to grow food
- Events and outreach
- More summits for discussion
- Farm tours
- Grants

Findings and Observations

Environmental Action

1. There is increased awareness of the benefits of fencing livestock out of streams.
2. As Dennis Buffington stressed, the place to begin dealing with on-farm energy is to maximize energy conservation before even thinking about alternative energy.
3. Farmers have to be convinced that environmental integrity can go hand in hand with profitability.
4. Easily accessed information about stewardship practices is important. Successful peer models are even more important.
5. The farm community is more than just the farmers; cooperation around environmental initiatives needs to become a high priority.
6. There is still a need for information and incentives to promote environmentally sensitive farming techniques and alternative energy sources

Next Generation Farmers

1. The short and long-term effects of the current economic crisis remain critical unanswered questions.
2. Farm choices need to be cast as career opportunities, with all the detailed considerations that might be involved in preparing for any career. The choices as far as farm size, types of crop, and approach (traditional, organic, sustainable) are wide ranging.
3. Although land ownership is appealing, there are successful farmers of all ages in the region who lease the land they farm.
4. Farming has become far more technologically sophisticated in recent years. It is possible to learn

how to farm even if you haven't a history of farming in your family. It is interesting that an increasing number of women are choosing to become farmers.

5. Farmers work hard and take pride in their farms' production and the role it plays in healthy communities.
6. Programs and incentives that reach out to the non-farming community to recruit future farmers can be effective.
7. Financial/tax incentives for land owners may encourage more land leases to add more tillable/pasture land available for farming

Small Farm profitability

1. Re the comment about lower taxes for farmers and open space, preferential treatment is available under Act 319.
2. Housing and corporate development open space can be capable of supporting CSAs.
3. Specialty crops are in demand by high-end restaurants.
4. Start small, ask for advice.

Legislative Action

1. Farmers at KFF '09 seemed to be surprisingly receptive to the idea of replacing the real estate tax with an income tax. This can only happen in the General Assembly.
2. Farmers need to feel that their legislators understand their needs.
3. Serious and direct discussion with legislators, both state and Federal, about farm-based issues and incentives can be productive.
4. Local governments should work with the farming community and discourage zoning that can penalize farming activities.

Farmers and Community Relations

1. Education about farming and food should be on-going, not just a "food unit" but rather a recurring theme to be found throughout any child's educational experience.
2. Real estate agents should be part of the "team," learning more about farming, passing information and perhaps even potentially positive attitudes on to their clients. The picture postcard farm may look appealing on a brochure, but no one who puts hard earned money into a new home should be surprised by the realities of farm activity.
3. When farmers seek to expand their operations, they are responding to the need for economies of scale similar to any business. Municipalities should look for ways to cooperate with ambitious farmers; they contribute to the economy and tax base.
4. CSA visit-the-farm programs should be encouraged.
5. It is important for members of the farming community to become involved in the issues that come before local, state and federal decision makers

Farming's Identity

1. All farmers, no matter what the scale of farming or the product, should be considered part of the farming community.
2. Consumers are being told where, for instance, the fish they buy comes from. The sources for Buy Fresh, Buy Local should be a matter of pride for the producer and the seller.
3. Proudly display your Keep Farming First bumper sticker! Get in touch with a KFF partner if you want more.
4. Locally grown produce should be identified with healthy living.
5. Bring non-farmer friends and neighbors to the next Keep Farming First summit.
6. While subdivision subsistence/back yard farms are gaining in popularity; large scale operations are often looked upon as nuisances.
7. The farm community is more than just the farmers; they are part of the entire community and

cooperation needs to become a high priority.

Agricultural Land Preservation

1. The perception that open space is wasted if it isn't farmed doesn't take into account the quality of life contributions that preserved open space make in urban and suburban communities.
2. All lands under conservation easement have the potential to be farmed. Even under the County preservation program, the specific farm use may change in the future. The important element is that the high quality soils remain available for needs as they develop.
3. On-going dialogue between the farming and non-farming community members, particularly with new residents new to the area, can avoid contention.
4. Farmland that isn't preserved today can't grow food for tomorrow.

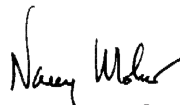
So here is the report from the Keep Farming First's very first Community Conversation. We know that when farmers get together, there is always plenty of productive talk. The report represents an effort at capturing some of the value for you, the farmers without whom our food world would not go 'round. Read it, react, let us know what you think, how we can help you, what you would like to see on the 2010 KFF program. Please contact us at info@CC2020.org, at our Keep Farming First clearing house address (217 West State Street, Kennett Square, PA 19348; 610-925-0900), or at the individual e-mails listed below. We wish you a growing season of sunshine and rain in the appropriate amounts as well as a bountiful harvest to be enjoyed by your non-farmer friends and neighbors.

Sincerely,



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Honorary Co-Chairs

The Chester County Commissioners: Terrence Farrell, Chair • Carol Aichele • Kathi Cozzone

Honoring Chester County Century Farmers

Bicentennial Farmers

Mr. and Mrs. H. Wheeler Aman
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Elliott
Mr. and Mrs. William Handy
Mr. and Mrs. Landis Reid

Century Farmers

Allerton Farm
Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Bailly
Mr. Edwin Baldwin III
Lewis Barnard
Gladys S. Beale

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Brosius
David Clevestine
Robert F. Cochran, Jr.
Joanne Sharpless Cruse
Mr. David Darlington
Mr. and Mrs. Elwood Fisher
The Jane Gordon Fletcher Family
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