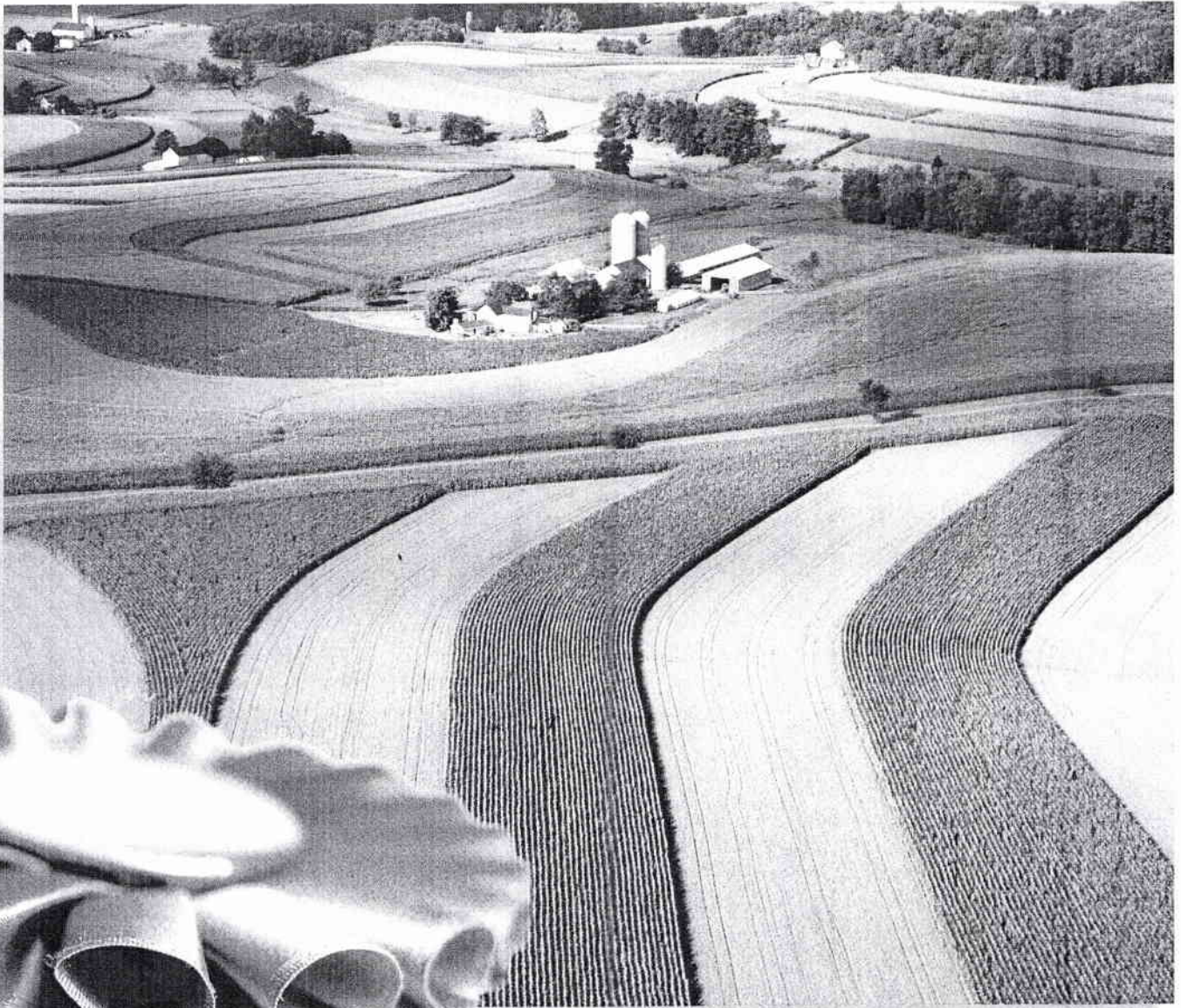


Keep Lancaster County Farming



—PHASE I REPORT—

Blue Ribbon Commission for Agriculture in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Report developed & paid for by:





Keep Lancaster County Farming

Keep Lancaster County Farming for Generations to Come—A letter from t

In public forums held in every corner of Lancaster County, diverse clusters of residents have spoken out thoughtfully and passionately about the future of local agriculture. From housewives to farmers, from businessmen to schoolteachers, they emphatically said farming and agriculture business not only must remain a keystone of Lancaster County's economy, but it must be strengthened. And they want government at all levels to help it remain robust.

These forums were one result of action taken by the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners. While recognizing the critical importance of agriculture to the local economy and overall quality of life, the commissioners are increasingly concerned about loss of farmland and the health of local agriculture. In the spring of 2005, the board created a Blue Ribbon Commission to find creative and innovative ideas to "Keep Lancaster County Farming."

This document is the Blue Ribbon Commission's report on its findings. It is with great enthusiasm that the Commission invites you to study and use the recommendations contained within. Whatever you expect, you will find some surprises. Local citizens are fertile with ideas about what Lancaster County must do to preserve its farmland heritage and agriculture economy.

The citizens who streamed into the forums did not need to be told that farmland is being consumed at an alarming rate by housing developments, strip malls and immense retail chain stores. Suburban sprawl is a daily factor in their lives. They made clear that they do not oppose growth and progress, but they want boundaries.

Beyond recommendations for action, this report reviews the significant role of agriculture both in Lancaster County history and in the present-day economy.

Agriculture has been a valuable part of Lancaster County's heritage since the first European settlers decided to build their future in this area. They came seeking freedom from persecution and stayed because of the agreeable climate, the rich soils, the ideal

Lancaster County citizens have spoken.

They need to be heard.

location and, originally, the similarities to the countries from which they were emigrating. Today this unique agrarian heritage is thriving with tens of thousands of farm and ag-business families still working the rich soils and maintaining the value that brought their ancestors here.

Our forebears had a marvelous work ethic which has been passed down through generations. This willingness to work hard, combined with abundant natural resources, created an agricultural foundation for a prosperous, diverse economy. It is this mix of business, industry and agriculture which makes Lancaster County unique.

Unfortunately, this very mix also makes it increasingly challenging for agriculture to prosper and for the county to preserve its rich agricultural traditions. At one end of the economic pipeline, farmers are cultivating thousands of acres of the most productive non-irrigated soils in the nation. At the pipeline's other end, developers see these open lands, mild climate and proximity to major urban markets as opportunity that is difficult to resist.

In its effort to ensure that agriculture has a strong future, the Blue Ribbon Commission sought ideas from the entire Lancaster County community. Residents responded not only in the 18 "listening sessions," but also by phone, email and in writing. They identified the challenges and suggested solutions. From the thousands of thoughtful ideas, the Blue Ribbon Commission ranked those concepts which offered the most definitive ways for Lancaster County agriculture to prosper.

It was made overwhelmingly clear that there is broad support for retaining a way of life that is threatened by development.

- We heard person after person say that Lancaster County's culture, predicated to a great extent on the wholesomeness of agriculture and farm life, must not be destroyed.
- We heard pleas for government to help maintain a "critical mass" of farms and farm-support businesses to sustain that agrarian heritage.


Blue Ribbon Leadership Team

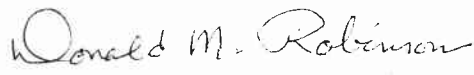
- We heard that the agricultural community, its work ethic and the contribution it makes to quality of life here cannot be replaced or duplicated by other industries.
- We heard that the diversity of Lancaster County's agriculture is unique and deserving of support. Large and small farms, crop and livestock production, truck and buggy agribusiness must not be allowed to perish, nor the infrastructure built upon that diversity be permitted, by neglect, to weaken.
- We heard, repeatedly, that land in agriculture is as fully "developed" as land that is devoted to manufacturing, retail or residential use. Pretty as it is, a farming landscape represents a family's business, not a hobby.
- We heard that whatever is possible must be done to encourage development in existing towns and the city, thus promoting their best use as centers for commerce, education, law, government, entertainment, culture and retailing.
- We heard emphatically that we stand at the crossroads of our future, and that the time for decision is now.

It is our hope that the recommendations and background in this report will serve as a blueprint for action by government, business, civic and farm leaders.

The process of gathering and refining the recommendations was of short duration, focused and intense. It was a privilege to serve as leaders for this group of dedicated individuals who implemented their roles and responsibilities with vigor.

These recommendations range from short-term to far-reaching. They offer a plan to nurture an agricultural economy that is indispensable, and that will "Keep Lancaster County Farming" for generations to come.


Luke Brubaker


Don Robinson


Marilyn Ware

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The Blue Ribbon Commission — Why?

Lancaster County's strong agricultural heritage is being threatened. For nearly 300 years the stewards of this land have increased its natural fertility by nurturing, conserving and improving the outstanding Class I, II and III soils. This uniquely fertile land, combined with a temperate climate and a rolling topography perfectly suited for farming, have contributed to Lancaster County's national reputation as "The Garden Spot."

Unfortunately, the factors which make it the most productive nonirrigated county in the United States also make it the perfect place for residential, commercial and industrial growth. The result is an irreplaceable agriculture under siege.

The economic contribution of agribusiness to the county and nation cannot be overstated:

- Agriculture is responsible for creating one in five jobs here.
- The diverse products that leave the farms bring in at least \$4 billion per year.
- Local farms generate \$1,938 in sales per acre. That far outdistances the national average of \$214.
- Lancaster County dairy farms rank ninth nationally in productivity.
- Lancaster County ranks sixth nationally in poultry and egg production.

Lancaster County WATER Facts

The average 85 acre farm with 60 cows per year:

- Farmland collects 34 million gallons of ground water from rain
- Cows & family use 1 million gallons of water

RESULT: Nearly 33 million gallons of ground water contributed

If 300 houses are built on this 85 acre farm:

- The housing development collects at least 1/3 less ground water from rain
- 300 families use over 16 million gallons of water

RESULT: 26 million fewer gallons of ground water contributed

It is not difficult to recognize that the demise of agriculture and its support system would have severe economic ramifications for all of Lancaster County and beyond. One need only look at other areas of Pennsylvania where important industries have withered to see the consequences: the ruin of anthracite coal mining in the middle of the twentieth century left many small communities

Lancaster County FARM Facts

Number of Farms	5,293
Average Farm Size.....	78 Acres
Total Acres of Farmland	411,848
Total Acres of Preserved Farmland	62,000
Percent of Land in Farmland	69
Value of Farmland Per Acre.....	\$7,955
Sales Per Acre of Farmland	\$1,938
Cash Receipts of Crops.....	\$156 Million
Cash Receipts of Livestock.....	\$758 Million
Total Cash Receipts	\$914 Million
Total Employment Value to County	\$1 Billion

without an economic base for survival; the loss of steel mills in the late 1980's made an impact on Pennsylvania and the nation that is felt today.

But the contribution of agriculture here extends beyond the products it offers the marketplace, the economic strength it gives to local communities and the quality of life residents of Lancaster County enjoy. It is a vital part of keeping the planet healthy. The county's approximate 600,000-acre land mass is part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and many of its ten sub-watersheds feed the essential Susquehanna River. Half of the bay's fresh water comes from the Susquehanna. Beyond that, the role of farmland is crucial in recharging groundwater supply, which is a lifeblood in Lancaster County communities.

The message that Lancaster County's economic health and well-being are intricately linked to its productive farmland cannot be ignored. The Blue Ribbon Commission for Agriculture in Lancaster County was created as an important step in the cooperative effort to Keep Lancaster County Farming.

Lancaster County FOOD Facts

EACH YEAR LANCASTER FARMERS FEED:

11.9 million people.....	eggs
10.2 million people.....	milk
3.3 million people.....	chicken
4.6 million people.....	pork
727,000 people	beef

Agriculture's Prosperous History & A Promising Future

The Pioneers

When the first Europeans arrived in the Conestoga and Pequea valleys, Native Americans had already discovered how well the land was suited for growing food. Indigenous plants like squash and sunflower were cultivated along with varieties of maize and beans that originated in Central America.

In 1711, Swiss Mennonites settled in what is now Willow Street and were soon joined by Germans, Scots-Irish, Quakers and others seeking to avoid religious, political and economic troubles. As in most of the New World frontier, over 90 percent of the immigrants became farmers.

Germans were the largest group in Southeast Pennsylvania and they brought to the New World a proud legacy of farming. Each early farmstead was self-sufficient, providing nearly all the family needs. Livestock was raised for home use, not for selling. Wheat was the one cash crop. Other grains included buckwheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt, clover, corn, hay, flax, hemp and grass. Some flax and hemp

were marketed, but they were used primarily for homespun family clothing.

When Lancaster's farms helped feed General Washington's troops at Valley Forge, he praised the subsistence farming which dominated Pennsylvania agriculture at the time. "Her husbandry, though not perfect, is much better and her crops proportionately greater" than elsewhere. (Leo Bressler)

Agriculture Becomes a Business

As American villages grew into towns and cities, farmers adapted their production for new markets created by the growing population. Crops and livestock, raised primarily for sale, became dominant on farmland. A cornucopia of farm products began to flow from Lancaster County on Conestoga wagons, the home-built ships of inland commerce.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a feeder beef industry grew and cattle were driven to Lancaster on hoof from as far west as

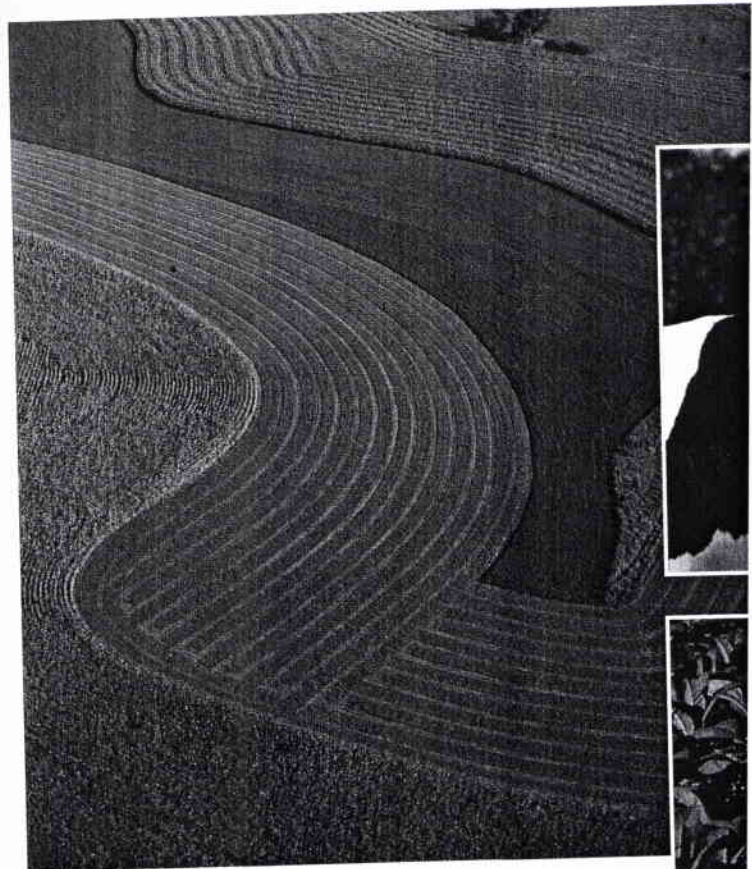


the Mississippi—twelve miles a day—sometimes 70 days per trip. The cattle were fattened here and driven to markets in Philadelphia. As railroads improved transportation, Lancaster's importance as a livestock center expanded. The Union Stockyard founded in 1868, moved near the railroad tracks in 1895 and became the center for Eastern U.S. livestock for years to come. As late as 1922, 7,293 rail cars of cattle were sold at the Lancaster Stockyard along with 361 cars of hogs and 22 cars of sheep. To illustrate the importance of this to Lancaster agriculture, 10,000 head of cattle were driven to the yards from Lancaster farms that year. At the same time, 5,200 tons of hay and 6,500 bushels of corn, nearly all grown on Lancaster farmland, went to the stockyard to feed those animals.

Over the last half century, the fat cattle industry moved west and waned in Lancaster County. One of the two remaining livestock auctions in the county, the New Holland Sales Stable, is still one of the largest horse and dairy auctions in the Eastern U.S. Although the Lancaster Stockyards now exist only in history, hog and cattle production remain substantial in Lancaster County.

As it has done throughout history, war was a catalyst for change in the agricultural industry. An early example of this was around 1810, when sheep farming reached a high point in Lancaster County. The embargo of 1808 and the War of 1812 cut off trade with England, which had supplied most of the wool to the American market.

The Civil War had great effect on another Lancaster County farm product. Tobacco has been cultivated in Lancaster since the early nineteenth century, when some Ephrata farmers rolled up Conestoga cigars and sold their "stogies" at five for a dollar. But it was the Civil War that made it a major cash crop. With the country divided and trade disrupted, tobacco shortages in the northern states inflated prices. Lancaster farmers increased production to meet the need. Tobacco soon became Lancaster's leading cash crop and remained that way for the next century. Amish and Mennonite farmers found labor-intensive tobacco production suited to their family operations and a reliable source of income. Over the last thirty years, the dangers of smoking have become widely known, consumption has dropped and fields of tobacco are not as common across our landscape as they once were.

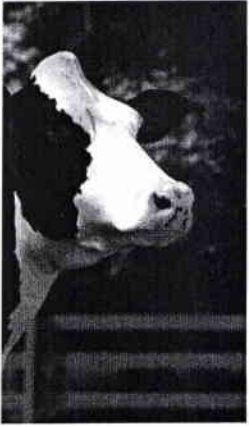


A labor shortage caused by the Civil War hastened a switch to farm mechanization. First, an explosion of animal-powered grain drills, cultivators and threshers changed how fields were farmed and crops harvested. Steam power soon followed and opened new lands in the west to agriculture. By the time Henry Ford's mass-produced gasoline tractors appeared in the 1920's, America's agricultural needs were being met by farms across the nation. With a bounty of open space, farms in some states expanded to corporate size and streamlined efficiency. Diverse climates and agricultural research produced crops of stunning variety. Lancaster farmers had to adapt, and they did.

Dairy farming is a prime example of local ingenuity. In 1830, dairying was a home enterprise and most milk product stayed on the farm. But the next fifty years saw upheaval with Borden's vacuum condenser, pasteurization, improved transportation and the replacement of native-bred cows with more productive breed stock. By 1890, the dairy industry was an organized commercial enterprise and Lancaster County had become one of the nation's leaders in market milk, butter and cheese, where it remains today. Many modern Lancaster County dairy farms are models of rural agriculture embracing science and technology. Others remain profitable with traditional family production systems.

"This is a community filled with blessings...a special place...."

—Student



In the early 1900's, America discovered the nutritional benefits of vitamins. Fresh fruit and vegetables became a more important part of the American diet—and an important new market for Lancaster County farmers. Its proximity to population centers enabled Lancaster to capitalize on the fresh foods business. Orchards and vegetable fields sprang up around the county. But progress in new packaging, advances in canning and freezing, and large-farm productivity in other areas again challenged local farmers. As always, they have proven equal to the task.

Lancaster Agriculture Industry Today

Today, Lancaster County agriculture is a multi-billion-dollar powerhouse. Farm production alone in 2003 totaled about \$890 million. Add to that the value of hundreds of ag-related support businesses plus the paychecks for their thousands of employees and it's clear that farming is the economic heartbeat of Lancaster County.



The ripples generated by our farm economy are felt far beyond county and state boundaries.

Nationally, in crop production Lancaster is the number one non-irrigated county in the United States. In poultry and egg production it ranks sixth in the nation. In dairy cows and milk products it is the ninth most generative county in the U.S. Lancaster County farms bring in \$1,938 in sales per acre, far greater than the national average of \$214 per acre. And Lancaster County ranks second in the nation in the number of horses and ponies on farms.

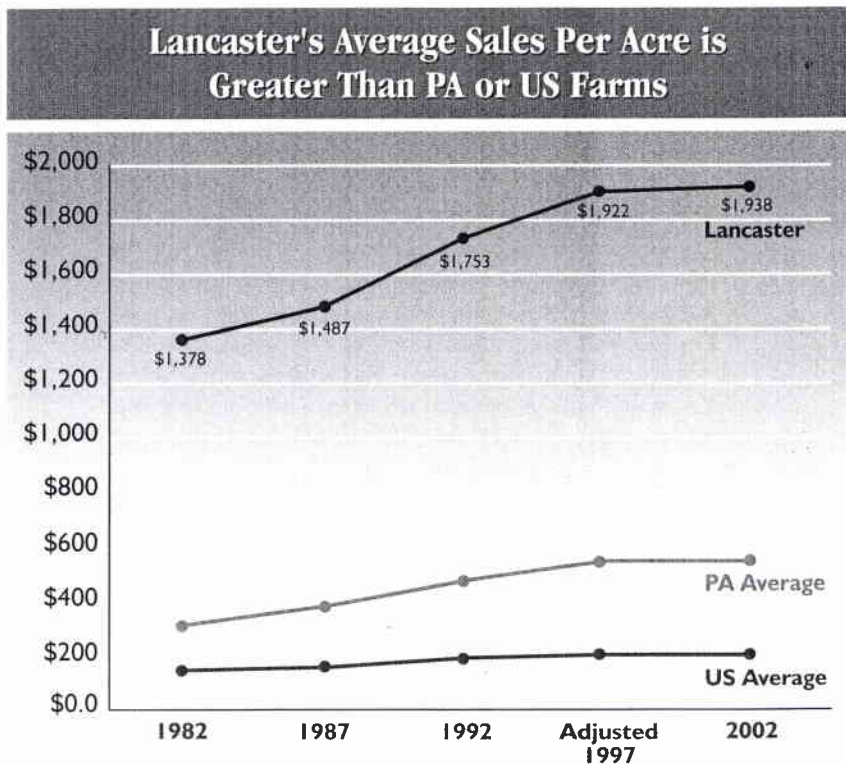
In Pennsylvania, the state agricultural report for 2003-2004 lists Lancaster County as **number one** in all important categories. :

- Field crop production. Lancaster's total was \$108 million. In second spot was York County with \$65 million.
- Dairy farm production. Lancaster totaled \$286 million. Second was Franklin County with \$118 million.
- Livestock value. Lancaster County, \$256 million. Second, Franklin County, \$107 million.
- Egg production. For Lancaster, \$119 million. Berks County, second, \$41 million.
- Broiler poultry. Lancaster County, \$94 million. Second, Snyder County with \$25 million.

In every category but one, Lancaster County farms produced more than double the value of any other Pennsylvania county.

Lancaster County also ranks nationally in another often overlooked category: direct farm-to-consumer sales. Roadside stands, quaint but efficient, are supported by local consumers and an intense tourist trade. With new programs urging urbanites to eat fresh, locally-grown foods, these stands meet the needs of a health-conscious populace and provide important income to farm families. Following only some large California counties, Lancaster today ranks seventh in the nation for direct farm sales to consumers.

Lancaster's proximity to growing East Coast population centers means unlimited potential for farm products. When the local farm economy strengthens, so does Lancaster County's overall economy. Support industries like equipment dealers,



Source: United States Census of Agriculture, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002.

fertilizer suppliers, seed companies, feed centers and distribution networks are thriving here. Their payrolls pump millions of dollars into area retailing and service businesses, into home-buying and car-buying.

Lancaster County Strives to Compete

With its billion-dollar capacity and unbroken years of financial growth, it appears Lancaster County agriculture has settled into a perfect economic environment. That is not the case. Our farm economy is being squeezed from top and bottom. It is financially robust now, but if current trends continue an ag business decline is inevitable.

From outside, Lancaster County's family-size farms are facing price and production pressure from larger farms. From within, surging residential, retail and industrial development is rolling over thousands of acres of farmland each year.

Local farmers have a well-earned reputation for efficiency, and they need it to compete in today's market. Nearly 80% of U.S. farm production comes from only 15% of the nation's two million farms. These potent farms average more than 1,700 acres. That is more than 20 times the size of Lancaster farms, which average only 78 acres.

The corporate-size farms are managed by a new generation of farmer, often with a degree in business management, economics or marketing. On his fields are the latest innovations in mechanization and technology, which improve production and reduce labor costs. Small process improvements that return \$10 per acre become significant when applied to 2,000-acre farms. The economies of scale enjoyed by large farms translate to lower product prices from farmer to distributor.

Lancaster County farmers are responding to the challenge. A growing number hold agriculture degrees from Penn State and other first-rate universities. They cooperate in cropland experimentation with ag scientists and embrace extension education. In some barns, feed and market cycles are tracked by computers. In others, family members skillfully work side-by-side, applying knowledge gathered over generations.

Dairy farming is an example of local vs. national competition. Lancaster is the ninth most productive dairy county in the nation. In Pennsylvania it produces 15 percent of the state's milk supply. While strong competition always existed from Wisconsin and California, emerging dairy states like Idaho and New Mexico are helping to change the business. One national trend is toward larger

herds on fewer farms, with increased productivity per cow. Lancaster's dairy farmers sharpened their skills and are producing 10 percent more milk per cow than the rest of Pennsylvania, and are on a par with top farms in high-production states.

The results speak for themselves. In 2002, average sales per farm in Pennsylvania were \$73,263. Nationally the average was \$94,245. Lancaster County's average sales were \$150,000—with an average farm size of 78 acres compared to Pennsylvania's average of 133 acres. And the average per farm net cash return for Lancaster County was \$33,441. That is more than double Pennsylvania's average of \$14,853, and far exceeds the national average of \$19,032.

Lancaster County, on average, is clearly outpacing both the state and nation in productivity per acre. However, as national farms become larger, that gap is closing.

The surest path to preserving Lancaster County farms is to keep them profitable. Local citizens who responded to the Blue Ribbon Commission call for ideas recognized that our farms cannot be expected to remain competitive without support from the community. Their ideas merit attention and action.

County Farmland Is Disappearing

Farm acres in Lancaster County are disappearing at a startling rate. Farms are not being nibbled by development, here and there. They are being swallowed whole, year after year. Despite the efforts of agriculture preservation programs, Urban Growth Boundaries and ag protection zoning, the brakes have not been applied to loss of farmland.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's census abstract for 2003-2004:

- There were 610 fewer farms in Lancaster County in 2003 than in 1998. The census counted 5,305 farms here in 2003, down from 5,915 six years earlier. That's an average loss of 101 farms a year.
- Farm acreage dropped from 418,000 in 1998 to 409,500 in 2003—a shrinkage of 8,500 acres. That averages 1,416 acres per year.





Not all of those acres were actively developed. Some went into parkland, and some into passive use such as conservation. And not all of the farms that were lost were profitable and productive. However, a study by the Lancaster County Planning Commission verifies the continuing expansion of development here. The report states:

“Between 1994 and 2002 an average of 1,233 acres were developed each year for residential and non-residential use. This amounted to 3.4 acres per day of new land development.”

While land within Urban Growth Boundaries is taking a strong share of that development, the planners report makes it clear that farmland is being equally, if not more rapidly, consumed. During those years, an average 498 acres per year were developed within Urban and Village Growth Areas. But 735 acres on average were built upon beyond designated growth areas—often farmland.

Among the troubling aspects of Lancaster County’s development dilemma is that more than sufficient land exists within Urban Growth Areas to accommodate new construction. County planners identify more than 34,000 acres of vacant buildable land in Urban Growth Areas. But without firm and determined guidance from public officials, plus commitment from farmers, developers continue to pave new areas of irreplaceable farmland.

Equally frustrating, when non-UGA land is developed, it is expended as if the supply is inexhaustible. When housing is built inside Urban Growth Areas, the average lot size is 0.2 acres. Inside Village Growth Areas, the average lot is 0.7 acres. But outside those zones, houses are built on an average lot of 1.3 acres. County planners note that if UGA guidelines were used on such open

land construction, six dwellings could be built on 1.3 acres, rather than one dwelling.

Lancaster’s aggressive farm preservation programs have inspired Pennsylvania government to become a more active partner in such efforts, here and across the state. National attention is periodically focused on the county’s grass-roots struggle to maintain its farmland economy. To many it appears farm preservation is banking land at a satisfying rate. But the truth is that farm preservation in Lancaster County must quicken in pace if it is to reach its potential before land prices increase beyond affordability.

And just as Urban Growth Areas won’t work without enforcement, farmland preservation needs constant and forceful leadership. More than 200 local farm owners are on a current waiting list to have their farms preserved, primarily due to an imbalance between supply (acquisition funds) and demand (applicants). Available funds for acquisition have not kept up with demand.

With more than 200 applicants to the county program, it is evident that Farmland preservation is not a program that needs to be “sold” to the landowners. Citizens at the Blue Ribbon Commission hearings, and farmers who are lined up to participate, clearly have bought into the concept. However, there are several townships in Lancaster that have barred the door to the county’s preservation program by denying the formation of the Ag Security Areas required for farmers to participate. There is clearly more work needed to “sell” farmland preservation in those areas.

Lancaster County is beginning to acquire and utilize the necessary tools to channel growth, but much more needs to be done. Urban and Village Growth Areas should be instituted throughout the county and public officials need to exert stronger influence on where their hometown growth is occurring and the agricultural areas within their communities are well protected and kept in tact. Other ideas, gathered in the Blue Ribbon Commission hearings, are defined in the recommendation section of this report.

Time for Action

The crossroads is here. The time for action is now.

That message was communicated to the Blue Ribbon Commission time and again in the 18 public hearings held across Lancaster County. Our fellow citizens at these hearings recognized that the future of Lancaster County is being decided, day-by-day. Even as they stood to speak, plans for

new homes and new strip malls were winding their way through local government commissions and boards.

On one level, this Blue Ribbon Commission report, with its numerous citizen ideas, focuses on the challenges facing Lancaster County agriculture. On a more-encompassing level, the future of all Lancaster County hinges on the action taken—or not taken—on these agribusiness recommendations. Either farming will remain robust and Lancaster County will retain its unique character, or farming will be allowed to wither and Lancaster County will turn into a mirror copy of the many urbanized counties that surround us.

It is not overstatement to say that a healthy agriculture economy is necessary for a healthy, well-balanced county. In Eastern Pennsylvania many counties once were blessed with strong farming economies. Now those counties are residential, retailing and superhighway centers where farm fields have all but disappeared. Quality of life often has been compromised by over-development.

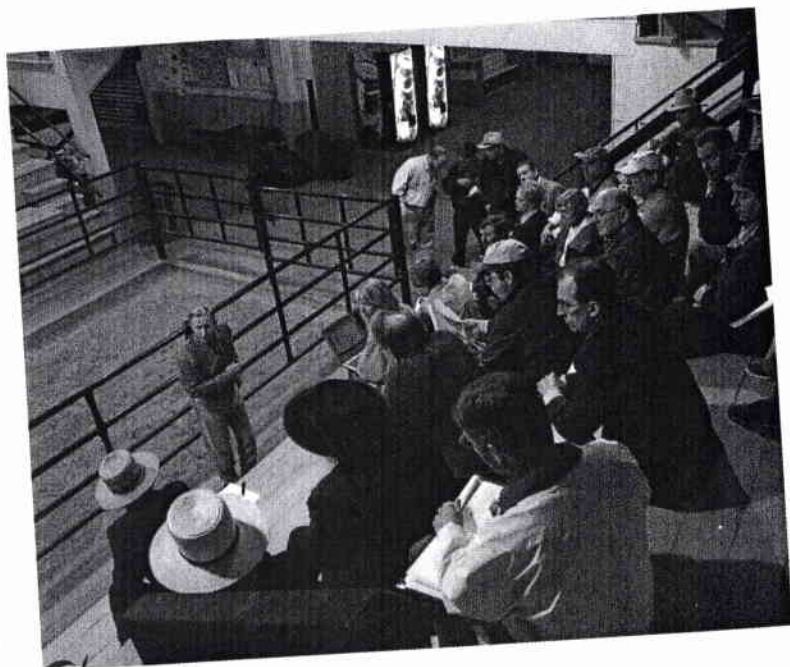
History has taught us that if there is one enduring tradition in Lancaster farming, it is the ability to adapt to change. Development, environment and competition will influence the way we farm here in the future, but the county's agricultural power will not be diminished if the necessary actions are taken now.

The late Darvin Boyd, who was a banker and president of the Lancaster Farmland Trust, knew that a strong farm economy was good business. In the book "Lancaster County" he was quoted:

"Lancaster County is a national treasure. It is our responsibility to be good stewards and to maintain its rich natural resources to enhance the quality of life for future generations. Let it be our legacy to help the national treasure flourish into the twenty-first century. That indeed is a most noble and worthy vision to fulfill."

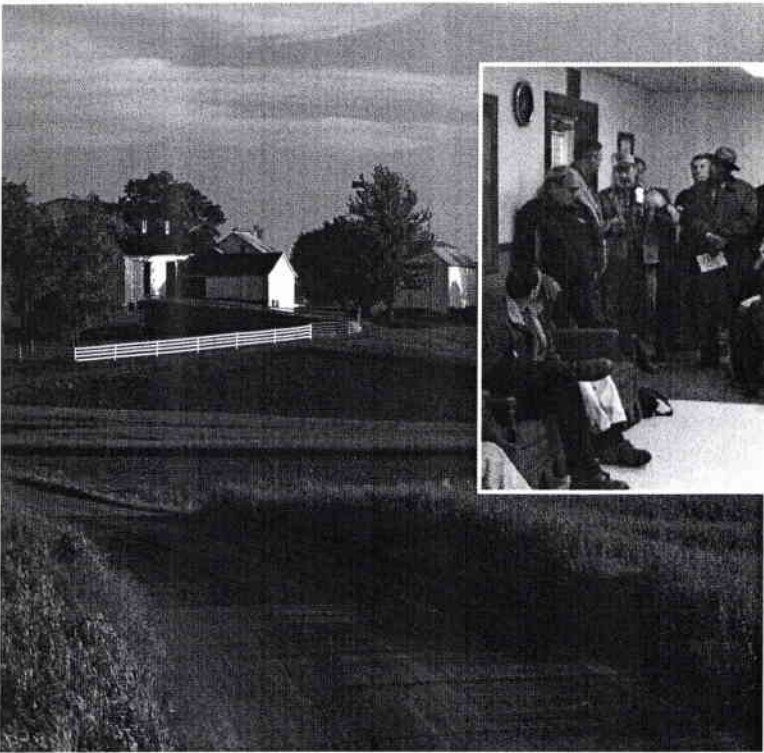
"This county has its own special magic..." —Farmer with Preserved Farm

The Blue Ribbon Commission Process...



To ensure the viability of Lancaster County agriculture for years to come, the Board of Lancaster County Commissioners created the Blue Ribbon Commission for Agriculture in Lancaster County on February 22, 2005. Its mission was straightforward: listen to Lancastrians and transmit thoughtful recommendations to appropriate leaders which, when implemented, will nurture the agricultural economy.

County Commissioners appointed a facilitator and a committee of three to select Blue Ribbon Commission members. In addition to press announcements, a website was designed to solicit input from the public for nominations to serve. Both self-nomination and the nomination of others were encouraged. In selecting members, the committee sought a broad mix of agricultural, academic, financial, philanthropic and economic interests.



An ad hoc committee was established of public officials and others who served in positions of leadership or who brought specific expertise. The ad hoc committee was invited to participate in all sessions, but only official members voted on the final recommendations. Tri-chairs were elected at the first meeting of the full commission, providing leadership and direction throughout the process.

It was determined that "listening sessions" would be held throughout the county to make it convenient for the public to participate. Initially nine sessions were scheduled, but the number quickly doubled to accommodate the intense citizen interest. A special effort was made to include members of the Plain Sect and youths. Additional meetings were held to brief local officials. Postcards listing the listening sessions were widely distributed and the dates were posted on the internet and noted in the media.

The results were inspiring. Thousands of comments were captured and recorded at the listening sessions, through a dedicated phone line and through the website. Following each listening session, notes were published on the website and distributed to commission members via email.

Any topic was open for discussion, but several clear themes emerged in the sessions: economic development, communications and leadership, farmland preservation, tax equity and zoning. The recommendations section of this report has been divided into these five areas of concern.

An important part of the process was the willingness of individuals and businesses to sponsor some of the meetings, and contribute in other ways to this project's success.

Most Blue Ribbon Commission members attended multiple listening sessions and thus developed a deeper understanding of issues that were of primary interest to the participating citizens. The commitment of members was impressive. Although listening sessions were held during the heavy spring planting season, farm leaders gave generous blocks of time. All three County Commissioners attended multiple sessions with the public.

Recommendations were forwarded to the County Commissioners on June 15, 2005, concluding the initial phase of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Upon receipt of the 52 recommendations, the County Commissioners put out another "call to action" and appointed an Implementation Team to study the suggestions and advise the commissioners on appropriate courses of action and specific implementation strategies.

Named as leadership for Blue Ribbon Commission II are Marilyn Ware, philanthropist and business woman; Noah Wenger, State Senator, 36th District; Scott Boyd, State Representative, 43rd District; Les Houck, Salisbury Township; Don Elliott, county administrator; and, Dan Heller, poultry and equine farmer.

This leadership team put out an appeal, again to the public, for volunteers to serve on Implementation Workgroups. Over 100 citizens with diverse back ground and experience volunteered to work on these committees. Over a period of eight weeks, these civic minded volunteers met, some of them weekly, and worked through each recommendation to develop strategies for implementing them. This second stage of the Blue Ribbon Commission for Agriculture, dubbed BRC II, is nearing completion with the leadership team currently reviewing the many implementation strategies submitted by the workgroups.

An additional phase or extension of the Blue Ribbon Commission is anticipated as strategies for implementation are refined and individuals and organizations best suited to execute them are determined.

I. Economic Development

A healthy agriculture economy is essential to the prosperity of Lancaster County and should be supported and sustained.

Agriculture is an industry that accounts for 11 percent of Lancaster County's economy and almost one fourth of its workforce, creating nearly \$1 billion in employment value. Farms, often viewed as ripe for development, are already fully developed economic enterprises and should be viewed as such. Agriculture needs to be recognized for its economic contribution and accorded the same level of business growth incentives and support as other industries.

An agricultural economic development organization should be established as a central resource for financial incentives, new business opportunities and marketing support. Attention must be directed toward agricultural infrastructure to develop processing and distribution facilities, manure management solutions and renewable fuels opportunities. The value of Lancaster County branded products needs to be explored and new market niches identified to provide future outlets for agricultural products.

These recommendations will contribute to the health and longevity of Lancaster agriculture and the economic prosperity of the entire county.

