



NEWS

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Montco Commissioners Celebrate 25 Years of Farmland Preservation While Helping To Open the Annual 4-H Fair In Creamery

Creamery, PA (August 6, 2015) – The Montgomery County Commissioners went to Creamery today to celebrate farming in Montgomery County.

Commissioners Josh Shapiro, Val Arkoosh, and Bruce L. Castor, Jr. helped to officially open the 31st 4-H Fair and to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Farmland Preservation Program in Montgomery County.

“When most people think of Montgomery County, farming is not one of the first things that comes to mind,” said Shapiro, “but farming is an important part of our economy, and that is why we are here today.” Shapiro noted that cash receipts from Montgomery County agricultural crops totaled \$18.4 million annually in the most recent data compiled, while the sale of animals and animal products totaled \$7.2 million.

Montgomery County has hosted a 4-H fair for more than 100 years, but this is the 31st year it has been held at the property in Creamery.

The county’s Farmland Preservation Program began in 1990. So far, 154 farms with over 9,000 acres have been preserved. Under the program, agricultural easements are purchased from productive farms in the county. In return the owner, and any subsequent owners, must keep the land as a farm in perpetuity, and is prohibited from building any non-agricultural buildings on the land.

“The Farmland Preservation program is essential to Montgomery County,” said Arkoosh. “It keeps these thousands of acres of land ‘open’ forever; it helps provide food to local residents and restaurants;

it helps preserve our county's agricultural heritage; and it provides an opportunity for younger farmers to buy land and enter the farming community.”

In attempting to boost the farming community in Montgomery County, the commissioners are also seeking ways to encourage farm to table initiatives in the county.

“We are in the process of updating our guide to local farmers' markets and food stands to give residents and visitors all the information they need to shop and eat locally,” said Castor. “The key is bringing farmers and consumers closer, because it will ultimately lead to healthy eating and living.”

The Montgomery County Department of Health has undertaken an innovative project that connects produce grown at Greener Partners' farm in Worcester Township with four Montgomery County Housing Authority sites, along with guidance on nutrition, cooking, and food preservation from trained Health Department staff.

This project is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Safe and Healthy Communities grant and provides the opportunity to provide weekly interaction with older and disabled adults to reintroduce the benefits of incorporating fresh produce into meal planning.

The purpose of this three-year project is to reconnect older adults on a fixed income to the nutritive benefits of fresh produce consumption by providing weekly opportunities to sample seasonal produce, receive hands-on education on food preservation techniques, as well as participate in group education on topics such as shopping on a budget and healthy food preparation. In addition, four community gardens will be built to sustain elements of the project that encourage fresh produce consumption.

A team of health educators, under the guidance of a registered dietician, coordinate produce selection and distribution to older and disabled adults residing in four designated housing units within the Montgomery County Housing Authority. Each week during the growing season, residents receive a selection of fresh produce along with a relevant recipe. Residents participate in monthly group education sessions provided by both farm and Health Department staff. Last year, two gardens were built at two Housing Authority units for residential use. Two additional gardens will be completed and ready for cultivation this year.

Approximately 130 residents have participated in portions of the project to date and are reporting increased knowledge of the benefits of a healthy diet. The produce distribution program has fostered a community feel among residents as they sharing their produce, recipes, and one another's assistance

in preparing the fruits and vegetables. Many residents tried new items that quickly turned into favorites.

The county is also working closely with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to conduct a local food marketing study. DVRPC will work to identify best practices in government-led local foods promotion initiatives and develop a prospective county-led program. DVRPC will conduct interviews with county farmers, buyers, and consumers to help identify ways in which we can better connect local food producers with local consumers.