

Sharing our 60th Anniversary



Just like the Conservation District, Mary Cooper also celebrated a 60th anniversary this spring - her 60th year living on her family's preserved farm in Shrewsbury Township.

Mary and her son Kevin own the 153-acre crop farm that was preserved by the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board in July 1997.

Although many longtime farming families make the complex decision each year to sell their property, according to Mary, preserving their family farm was not a difficult decision. She spoke of the peace and tranquility that she has experienced there over the past six decades. Her husband Claude, "had been very passionate about farmland preservation in York County, and I know that this farm has been in the Cooper family since 1922." Since Claude was born on the farm and grew up there, Mary knew that preservation was the only option for their family.

Once a farm has been preserved it is the responsibility of the Ag Land Preservation staff to inspect the property each year in order to assess whether the provisions of the deed of easement are being observed. These annual inspections are required by the state.

A number of issues are on the agenda during the inspections, but the major focus is on conservation and the observance of the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Law. During the annual inspection visit Ag staff meet with the landowner to discuss the farm and to see if there have been any changes since the previous inspection, including any changes in the operation, ownership or structures.

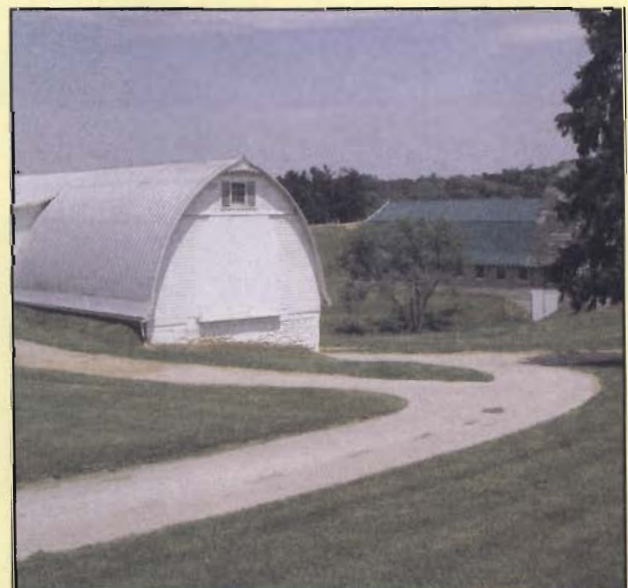
It was at this annual inspection in 2007 that the Cooper's historical attachment to the farm came to light. When the Cooper's first moved to the farm they had 8 cows and sold raw milk to local customers who would bring their own containers to the dairy. This practice allowed the Coopers to sell their milk raw instead of pasteurizing it - a technique they would have to adopt if they were to sell the milk in their own containers. Mary also noted the decline in dairy farms in Shrewsbury Township and spoke about the changes in local agriculture and the increase in residential development - all factors in their decision to hold on to their farm at all costs.

While they no longer dairy farm, Kevin Cooper, who is now the operator, grows crops including corn, beans, alfalfa and timothy hay. And since the farm has been preserved he has been careful to focus much of his energy on conservation practices and is now farming almost entirely using no-till equipment.

A visit to the to their beautiful farm off of Deer Creek Road confirms their continued love for the land and commitment to an agricultural way of life.

- submitted by Sally Barnes

For more information on the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board's conservation easement purchase program please contact Patty McCandless at (717) 840-7400.



The York County Agricultural Preservation Program

Preservation and Conservation: A Perfect Match

By David Boose Jr., Ag Resource Conservationist



At a time when online dating services are always promising their ability to match you with your soul mate for life, I have decided to join them and make a similar promise. Although I certainly cannot claim to be an expert matchmaker, I can guarantee my choice of a perfect match: Preservation and Conservation. The Deed of Easement, signed by landowners when their farm is preserved through the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Program states, "The agricultural conservation easement created by this Deed shall be a covenant running with the land and shall be effective in perpetuity." When landowners sign the Deed of Easement, they are signing an agreement or "covenant" not only for their current farm operation, but with "the land" within the boundaries of their farm which they offer to the easement program. The easement is perpetual, meaning it is to last forever.

When we realize the seriousness of a perpetual covenant with "the land" on a preserved farm, we can see how conservation and preservation make the perfect match. When we understand and desire that the land on which agricultural production is taking place today will also be used for agricultural production years and years from now, we don't want the resources on that land to wash away, be mismanaged, or degraded. If we truly value the farm we are preserving, we will desire to retain and even enhance the farm's blessings to future generations. We cannot have true preservation without conservation.

Although I do not charge for my matchmaking services, I would be misleading (as with many dating services), if I did not state that as with all perfect unions and worthy goals, there will be challenges and often costs. To implement best management practices in the farm's conservation plan & meet the requirements of the Agricultural Land Preservation Program (which requires the plan to meet the Pa Clean Streams Law), there are costs involved for the landowner and the operator. Having stated this truth, I will then make everyone aware that there are numerous programs and agencies standing ready to partner for the cause of conservation. Two of these partners, who work closely with the Preservation Program are the York County Conservation District, 717-840-7430, and the USDA- Natural Resource Conservation Service, 717-755-2966 Ext 3. When a landowner or operator works with these partners, they can learn about the many funding and technical assistance options available.

Whether you as a reader are the owner or operator of a preserved farm or not, you should be aware that you play an important part in the success of both preservation and conservation in York County. You may be involved as a taxpayer in supporting these goals, or in encouraging your local representatives and officials to support these goals. Even though there are challenges to preserving the land "in perpetuity," our efforts now for preservation and conservation will bring lasting blessings to our community, just as any perfect union.

The County Ag Land Preservation Board holds public monthly meetings on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm in Room 4 of the County Annex Building, 118 Pleasant Acres Road, adjacent to the County Nursing Home.

Phone: 717-840-7400/Monday - Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board
Farmland Preservation Update
Patty McCandless, Program Director

The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board welcomes aboard new staff member, Sally Barnes. Sally fills the vacant Ag Resource Conservationist position. Sally comes to us from England. Sally first came to the US as an exercise rider for a racehorse trainer in Northern Virginia in 1999. She enjoys horse riding and fox-hunting as well as spending time with her husband while working on renovating their old farm house in Dallastown. Sally graduated with a degree in agricultural economics from the University of Reading, England.

In other preservation news, Thursday, October 25, 2007 is the date for the annual County Agricultural Land Preservation Board's public meeting which kicks off the 2008 Ag Land Preservation application round. The meeting will be held at 7 PM in Room 1 of the County Annex Building, 118 Pleasant Acres Road, adjacent to the County Nursing Home. Interested landowners should call to reserve a seat and literature packet.

Deadline for the 2008 application round will be Friday, January 11, 2008. Landowners who have submitted a qualifying application in the past, will be automatically considered for the 2008 application round. Application update forms have been mailed out to past applicants and should be returned no later than January 11, 2008 if changes to the farm deed or operation have occurred.

The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board received notification that \$6 million was allocated for ag conservation easement funds for easement purchases by the County. Two million dollars was allocated for use on 2007 easement purchases. The balance, \$4 million, will be used during the next 2 years to purchase agricultural conservation easements from qualifying applications received. The County leveraged additional 2007 State match funds totaling \$2.88 Million as a result of the County's 2007 allocation.

With the funding allocation available, the County Board was able to move down the 2007 ranking list to make offers to appraise the top 21 farms. Qualifying easement applicants that were not funded in 2007, will roll into the 2008 application cycle. The program office recommends applicants review their easement application with staff yearly to ensure accurate and current information is used in the ranking process.

To date the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board has purchased agricultural conservation easements on 185 farms, covering 32, 000 acres throughout the county. Preserved farms can be found in 25 municipalities throughout York County.

Landowner's may contact the program office at 840-7400 to make an appointment to review their easement applications and update information as needed. The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board office hours are Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 4:30 PM. Call 717-840-7400 for more information.

York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board
Program Updates and Reminders
By Patty McCandless, Program Director

The January 2006 application cycle has been a very busy year for the York County Ag Land Preservation Program Office. The Board requested the appraisal of 25 farms on 2,323 acres. Those appraisals have now been completed by Agrarian Associates, Inc. with Board offers being approved monthly. Appraised easement values are continuing to come in at record easement values as real estate values for all land uses continue to increase during 2006. Rising easement values has prompted Board members to consider discussion of a possible cap on easement values. A majority of southeastern and southcentral easement programs in Pennsylvania today have set caps limiting easement value offers. The goal of caps is to further extend limited easement funds.

Landowners interested in farmland preservation are reminded to contact the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Program Office to review their land preservation options and determine if farmland preservation is a viable option for their family farm. Staff will review the easement application and using a geographic information system program evaluate and qualify the natural resources on the farm. For landowners new to the program, an appointment is recommended prior to qualification in order to review the program requirements prior to making application. A public meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 15, 2006 to discuss the program requirements. The meeting will start at 7 pm in Room 1 of the County Annex Building, located at 118 Pleasant Acres Road in York. Deadline for application is Friday, January 12, 2007 for the next application cycle.

Landowners who have previously made application to the easement program are encouraged to update their easement application annually to ensure the most current information is used for qualifying and ranking your application. If your farm deed or operation has changed, please contact our office to update your application. Application update forms have been sent to current easement applications on September 1, 2006.

Legislative changes to Act 43, Ag Security Area Law, such as Act 46, now permit landowners to donate easements to their County, and other recognized non-profit conservation organizations. Act 46 also encourages local units of government to preserve farmland through easement purchases and multi-agency easement agreements transaction are now possible. Donations of an easement not only protects the farmland for future farm generations, but may also qualify the landowner for a charitable tax contribution. Act 46 brought changes that require conservation plans be updated only when a change in land management practice takes place, or when a violation of the Clean Stream Law occurs. Previously all conservation plans had to be updated automatically every ten years or when a change in ownership occurred.