

Preserving Agriculture and Natural Resource Land

Peter Zettlemyer and his family believe we can preserve farmland and conservation land on the same farm. Born and raised in Albany Township, with its scenic farms on rolling hills and valleys, the famous Blue Mountain, and the abundance of natural resources, their goal is to honor "ALL" the land. The County/State Agriculture Land Preservation Program came slower to this area because of the emphasis on higher class soils found in the limestone areas of Berks. But Peter did not give up. His application to enter the Berks/Pennsylvania Agriculture Land Preservation Program was finally accepted in 2022. Peter said, "We decided to sell the right to do exactly what the program is intended to do and that is to preserve the farm forever." At the same time, because of their respect for natural resources, they preserved the conservation land on the farm through the conservation group "Resource Environmental Solutions". Peter said, "We preserved the conservation land to help bring the wetlands and life back to our streams from years of overgrazing cattle.

In business since 1993, at Quaker City Farms LLC, all the family is involved. LeAnne, who has been a teacher in the Reading School District for 30 years, is the bookkeeper. Reuben and Asher, their two sons, help with the farm work while working off farm. Reuben is a mechanic and Asher a welder, both skills that aid in the farming operation. Daughter Leah, who just graduated as salutatorian from Kutztown, will be starting her chemical engineering studies at Penn State and is the farm's idea person.

The preserved farm is 75 acres and with rental ground, 600 acres grow hay, corn, soybeans, grain sorghum, wheat, and rye. All hay is sold privately to animal farms within 60 miles of the home farm. In addition to the crops, raising dairy heifers has been part of the farm business for 21 years. Having Albright's Mill close by is a benefit for picking up supplies and having a weigh station. "Weather is a big challenge, but the last couple of years it's been the financial end. With high input costs, it's ever so hard to stay afloat. It is very hard to stay positive" stated Peter.

When talking about working the land, Peter says; "The best part of farming is being able to work with my family and friends on this beautiful land." Peter can be proud of many accomplishments he and his family have attained. But he said "My proudest time, besides my family, was writing the last mortgage check for the farms."

When asked what is needed for the future, he mentioned, "How to address the difficulties for the next generation to afford to keep farming. We must make them more aware of programs that can help them. Our society will need them!"

