

AGRICULTURE BRIEFS

TYRONE

Local FFA members attend conference

Several Tyrone Area FFA Chapter members recently attended the Fall Leadership Conference at the Blair County Convention Center. More than 420 Pennsylvania FFA first-year members and officers were engaged in leadership workshops, which varied from specific officer responsibilities to the many opportunities in the Agricultural Education Program through classroom instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experience and what FFA has to offer to members. Tyrone members attending included: Chloe Case, Toni Burns, Destiny Sullivan, Alexis Brode, Brandon Decker, Jaylon Beck, Mariah Simondale, Baylee DelBaggio, Katrina Hagenbuch and Maddie Veit.

HARRISBURG

Centre County horse wins at Harrisburg show

The Percheron, Anderson's Bentley, exhibited by Gerald Allebach of Windermere Farms, Spring Mills, was selected as supreme champion of the draft horse halter show at the 59th Keystone International Livestock Exposition, held at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex and Expo Center in Harrisburg. Bentley, a 3-year-old, was the winner of the Stallion 3 Years and Over class.

Among the other breed champions were:

- Grand Champion Belgian Mare — DHF Master's I'm Savannah, exhibited by Lewis and Gail Biddle, Oak Hall Farm, Boalsburg.
- Reserve Grand Champion Clydesdale Mare — Orchard View Merlin's Ava, exhibited by Derry and Tammy Furry, Orchard View Clydes, New Enterprise.
- Grand Champion Percheron Gelding — Soap Greek Eric, exhibited by David Hershey, Spring Mount Percherons, Warriors Mark.
- Reserve Grand Champion Percheron Gelding — Vegas, exhibited by David Hershey, Spring Mount Percherons, Warriors Mark.
- Grand Champion Percheron Mare — Windermere's Morning Rain, exhibited by Gerald Allebach, Windermere Farms, Spring Mills.
- Reserve Grand Champion Percheron Mare — Windermere's Ozzie, exhibited by Gerald Allebach, Windermere Farms, Spring Mills.

The Keystone International Livestock Exposition is the largest livestock show on the East Coast, featuring nearly 4,000 animals, including beef cattle, horses, sheep, pigs and goats.

STATE COLLEGE

Business to partner with FFA to create hot sauce

The students of State College High School will partner with the State College Little Lion FFA and Sweet Heat Gourmet to create a hot sauce produced from local products.

All profits from the hot sauce will be donated to the State College Food Bank, Centre County Youth Service Bureau and State College Meals on Wheels.

Sweet Heat Gourmet is a local specialty sauce company that uses natural and locally grown products in all of its sauces. This holiday season, they will be collaborating with students from State College High School to produce a raspberry peach hot sauce.

The peaches will be provided from Way Fruit Farm, and the raspberries will be provided by Paul Hessley, teacher and coordinator of the project.

The students will assist in making the hot sauce, designing a label for the product and coming up with marketing promotions for the product.

When it is complete, the sauce will be sold locally at Way Fruit Farm, Gift Adventures, Pasta & Ravioli Co., Calico Cafe and UPS on Collonade Way for two weeks and then will be available on its website, sweetheatgourmet.com.

UNIVERSITY PARK

Penn State Extension works to support farmers

Penn State is teaming up with established farmers to help new farmers become more profitable, productive and sustainable. With funding from the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher project, the Penn State Start Farming team is offering study circles, courses and "Models for the Future" demonstration plots.

Penn State Extension has partnered with seven growers across Pennsylvania to participate in the "Models for the Future" program, which will provide on-farm demonstration sites that illustrate best management practices and provide living classrooms for developing new farmer networks.

Each of the seven growers are maintaining vegetable, berries and or fruit trees, over the course of three years.

ANTIS FAMILY AT HOME ON THE FARM



Mirror photos by Gary M. Baranec

Bob VanKirk, his wife, Diana, and their son, Robert, 15, operate 4 Seasons Farm in Antis Township. Bob VanKirk grew up on a farm and runs 4 Seasons Farm in addition to his work as a pharmaceutical sales representative.

A labor of love

VanKirks relish role raising high-quality meat

By WALT FRANK
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GRAZIERVILLE — Bob VanKirk holds a degree in chemical engineering. His wife, Diana, holds degrees in dietetics and exercise physiology.

But the VanKirks — owners of 4 Seasons Farm in Antis Township — love farming.

"His passion is farming. It is in his blood. Now it is in our son's blood," Diana VanKirk said.

Bob grew up on a farm in Enon Valley near the Pennsylvania-Ohio border with more than 100 registered Holstein cattle.

He said his father discouraged him from going into farming, so off he went to Penn State, graduating in 1989 with a degree in chemical engineering.

He went to work at Wonder Chemical near Fairless Hills and made plastic bottles for seven years and then moved on to Pfizer Pharmaceuticals in 1996 and has worked for them as a sales representative ever since.

He still finds time to run his farm.

"It (farming) was supposed to be a hobby, but it turned into something bigger than that," Diana VanKirk said.

Bob missed farming, so he and Diana bought their farm here in 2005.

"I wanted my kids to have the farm experience and gain the work ethic that goes along with it. You need to find a niche market," Bob VanKirk said.

The VanKirks started out raising beef and pork for their family. They also raise some chickens and turkeys and grow vegetables for their own use.

Today, they sell their beef and pork products to family, friends and local customers.

"We take pride in offering the best grass-fed beef and pastured pork available," Bob VanKirk said.

Grass-fed animals produce bet-



4 Seasons Farm specializes in raising Registered Devon cattle, a top choice for grass-based production.

ter products.

"Grass-fed beef is healthier food. It contains about one-third of saturated fat, is high in CLA and is higher in vitamin E. We think it tastes better," Bob VanKirk said.

Jon Epple of Bellwood has been buying beef and pork from the VanKirks for about five years.

"I trust the quality of the meat because I know how they are raising the animals. It is farm fresh. It is excellent. I know it is healthier for our family," Epple said.

4 Seasons Farm specializes in raising Registered Devon cattle.

"We have 50 Registered Devons and 100 other cows — Angus and Herefords and a percentage Devons," Bob VanKirk said.

According to the Livestock Conservancy, the Devon is known for high quality beef, and the breed's hardiness and grazing ability makes it an excellent choice for grass-based production. The Devon is distantly re-

lated to other British and European breeds found in North America, so it provides great hybrid vigor when used in commercial cross breeding.

"Our family has become fond of the Devon disposition and performance on grass. Devon cattle are associated with outstanding performance under tough conditions, making them a great choice for grass-fed forage only operations. Their efficiency and moderate frame makes finishing them out to quality beef much easier," Bob VanKirk said.

Devon bulls are used for breeding — crossing Devon bulls with other breeds offers hybrid vigor and improved growth rates — as 4 Seasons Farm has implemented a comprehensive breeding program designed to develop and continually improve its herd of Registered Devon cattle.

"We do artificial insemination, embryo transplants and conventional breeding with our bulls. It is amazing what they can do. With our best cow and our best bull, we can get six to eight

calves per year as a result of embryo transplants. Normally you only get one calf per year. We are proud to offer some top genetics through our semen sales and often have select cattle for sale. We sell bull semen all over the country," Bob VanKirk said.

The VanKirks also sell 50 to 70 finished animals a year for freezer beef.

Bill Picken of Dundee, Mich., has been a customer for about two years.

"He is the only guy that has beef that is as good as mine. He has the same high standards that I do. I can't tell the difference between my animals and his animals," Picken said.

The VanKirks recently took one of their Devon bulls — 2,430-pound Adventure Rotokawa 97K — to the Red Devon USA National Show and Sale in Anderson, S.C., where he was named Reserve Grand Champion. The VanKirk's son, Robert, took second place in the Junior Judging Contest.

"It was the first show we went to. We decided we needed to get our animals out there. We were very excited about it. To come in second was pretty impressive out of about 15 bulls. There was a lot of competition. We didn't know what would happen. It is not just the recognition, it is a good marketing tool to have. We put him to the test with other animals," Bob VanKirk said.

Future plans call for going to more shows and to continue to increase the Registered Devon cattle herd and work to improve the quality of the Devon breed, Bob VanKirk said.

"What we are offering is unique in Devon bulls. We have may different blood lines and genetics that will be a benefit to the breed," Bob VanKirk said.

Mirror Staff Writer Walt Frank is at 946-7467.

FFA SPOTLIGHT

A monthly feature on an area student

Kermit P. Foor IV

Age and school: 16, Bellwood-Antis High School

Family: Parents, Michelle and Kermit III, and younger brother, Hunter

FFA Chapter: Bellwood-Antis

Years involved with FFA: 1½ years



Foor

FFA projects: Poultry Production and Foor Your Entertainment DJ Service

Favorite FFA memory: Chapter Officer Camping trip from June 2015

FFA accomplishments: Star Greenhand Award

How has FFA prepared you for



your future aspirations: FFA has provided me leadership skills, which I can use to succeed in the future.

Special thanks: I would like to thank Mr. (Matthew) Webreck and my family for supporting me.

Quote: "FFA is very rewarding. You can be yourself!"