

Workshop Promotes Innovative Ideas to Increase Farm Income

LOUANN GOOD
*Food and Family
Features Editor*

LEESPORT, Pa. - Innovation is the key to farming success, according to the Berks County Conservation District's first Innovative Agriculture Workshop conducted at Leesport Farmers Market Monday.

Facing rising fuel costs, stringent nutrient management laws and an energy crisis needn't spell financial ruin but can offer new sources of profit for agriculture entrepreneurs.

Veal farmer David Lucas is one of the innovative farmers who spotted potential for niche marketing about five years ago. He took a risk and renovated half his barn to house a recycling operation that turns used oil filters and scrap steel into added income.

Lucas, his wife Sharon and

eight children use 50 of their 74 acres between Bernville and Strausstown for intensive grazing pasture. They raise 200 veal calves per group and offer a vegetable subscription service to customers. But recycling is offering the family a profitable niche marketing opportunity, though not without hurdles.

Since Pennsylvania does not mandate recycling oil filters, unlike many states, Lucas has a harder time convincing customers that waste oil should not be dumped in a landfill to contaminate water and soil but be recycled.

Most people are shocked to hear that one gallon of waste oil can contaminate one million gallons of ground water. Lucas said the statistics are a selling point that encourage businesses to take the initiative to recycle although the

government does not require it.

To attain the necessary permits to install a recycling site on his Berks County farm took a whole year and a hefty monetary investment.

Now that his business, Lucas Lane Oil Filter Reclaiming, is established, Lucas delivers 55 gallon drums to businesses that do any kind of oil changes. They toss the used oil filters into the drums and Lucas collects them periodically for recycling by charging a pickup fee of \$50 a barrel. His crusher compacts the filters into 40 pound cubes before placing them in an oven which reaches as high as 1,750 degrees Fahrenheit. The oil that is trapped inside the filters continues to be released, as they are heated, and captured. Some of this oil Lucas uses for the fuel for the oven and the rest is sent to an oil recycling company for recycling. The scrap steel also offers a bit of income for Lucas, who sells it to a foundry that melts it to produce new products.

The farm also benefits from the heat generated from the oven. The heat is transferred to warm the veal calf barn.

Lucas can run the crusher's diesel motor on a mix of diesel and waste oil and has plans to install a generator to produce electricity for the farm using the diesel/waste oil fuel.

Lucas was only one of several farmers who shared how friendly environmental practices can add to farm income. Some agriculture business representatives also shared progress made in developing alternative fuels using corn, switchgrass and ag plastic recycling.



David Lucas, left, discusses recycling oil filters with Chris Johnson, nutrient management technician with Berks County Conservation District.

