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Chester County Commissioners present agricultural awards

West Chester, PA – The Chester County Board of Commissioners, along with the Agricultural Development Council (ADC) presented two agricultural awards at the Commissioners’ Meeting September 17.

The Farmer of the Year award was presented to Robert Lange, owner and operator of Sugartown Strawberries, located on 230-acre Willisbrook Farm in Willistown, PA. Willisbrook Farm is a Century Farm which has been in Lange’s family since 1896. The Distinguished Agricultural Service award was given to Robert Ray, a longtime farming education advocate, retired dairy farmer and at 29 years of service, the longest serving ADC council member to date.

The Chester County Farmer of the Year Award is presented to a deserving individual or family who exemplifies outstanding farm practices, has an innovative operation and keen business sense, and who runs a well-maintained farm.

This year marks the first time that anyone has been the recipient of both the Farmer of the Year award and the Distinguished Service to Agriculture award as Robert Lange won the service award in 1996 for his work to successfully lobby for improved estate tax laws for agricultural properties. In addition to his lobbying work, Lange is a hugely popular figure in Chester County agriculture and his Sugartown Strawberries operation hosts approximately 5,000 school children a year. He grows a variety of produce including pumpkins, sunflowers, and of course, strawberries. Portions of the farm are in agricultural preservation and he employs a variety of conservation practices to protect and manage the natural resources on the property.

“When I first met Robert, the thing I was most struck by was his passion for what he does,” said ADC Director Hillary Krummrich. “You can’t help but be captured by his enthusiasm.”

The Distinguished Agricultural Service award is given to an individual who has made significant contributions to, and provided exceptional service for the Chester County agricultural community.

Longtime ADC board member Robert Ray has done all of that and more for the residents of Chester County. Although Ray retired from his own dairy business in 1994, he still grows hundreds of pounds of produce to donate to the Chester County Food Bank. Until last year, Ray drove the tractor at Highland Orchards, giving tours of the property and educating thousands of visitors about the importance of

agriculture. In 2000, Ray conveyed 40 acres to Wallace Township to be turned into a public park. A past director of Chester-Delaware County Farm Bureau and volunteer school educator, Ray has spent much of life increasing public awareness of the importance of local agriculture.

The Chester County Agricultural Development Council promotes agriculture in Chester County by raising awareness on issues regarding the viability of local agricultural and promoting agricultural excellence and farming. For more information visit the website at www.chesco.org/agriculture.

For more information about Farmer of the Year award recipient Robert Lange and Sugartown Strawberries, visit <http://sugartownstrawberries.com>.