



THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



COMMISSIONERS
Michelle Kichline
Kathi Cozzone
Terence Farrell

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
Government Services Center, Suite 270
601 Westtown Road
P.O. Box 2747
West Chester, PA 19830-0990
(610) 344-6285 Fax (610) 344-6515

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Contact: Hillary R. Krummrich, Esq.
Director of Agricultural Development
Phone: 610-344-6285

Chester County Commissioners present agricultural awards Local food allies recognized for farming excellence and community service

WEST CHESTER, Pa. – The Chester County Board of Commissioners, along with the Agricultural Development Council (Ag Council), presented two agricultural awards at today’s Commissioners’ Meeting.

The 2017 Farmer of the Year award was presented to Don Cairns of Cairns Family Farm in Parkesburg, Pa.

When you think of the farm to table movement, artisanal cheese or heirloom tomatoes on a restaurant menu might be what first come to mind. However, chances are good that if you’ve eaten pretzels, bread, or baked goods from a local bakery, you’ve eaten something grown on Farmer of the Year Don Cairns’ family farm. Much of the wheat that he grows is milled into flour at nearby mills and is found in baked goods made and sold right here in the county. The rest of his crops, including corn and soy, are used for animal feed for area livestock.

In addition to his critical role in the local food chain, Cairns was nominated for the Farmer of the Year award by the Chester County Conservation District for his ongoing commitment to conservation practices including no-till farming and soil improvement on the approximately 1,650 acres of land he farms in the county, both owned and leased. During the past two decades, he has seen improved crop yields and undeniable improvements in soil conservation as a result. His exemplary farming practices have also resulted in favorable reviews from neighboring farmers and the landowners whose property he leases.

Cairns is optimistic about the future of farming in Chester County. While he did not grow up on a farm, he developed a keen interest in farming at a young age. He believes the farm dream is attainable to others like him who are passionate to learn and up to the challenge of hard work. When asked what he believes to be necessary for the farming industry to continue to thrive in the future in Chester County, Cairns replies, “Land stewardship, land preservation and encouraging the next generation of farmers are the three areas we emphasize the most.” Fittingly, he has helped over 25 local farm families preserve their farm, and currently serves as Vice Chairman of the Chester County Ag Land Preservation Board. He has served on the County 4-H Center board for 28 years, and was instrumental in developing the Romano 4-H Center, which is an incubator for aspiring farmers. He has also spent 10 years coaching the 4-H Livestock Judging Team. He also serves on the USDA Farm Service Agency County Committee as well as other volunteer roles.

The Distinguished Agricultural Service award was presented to Deb Ellis for her ongoing work with the Mobile Ag Ed Science Lab program (Ag Lab), an initiative of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau that brings agricultural education to classrooms all over the state via a classroom on wheels. A former Coatesville School District teacher, Ellis worked as the Ag Lab program assistant for the eastern portion of the state for ten years, guiding teachers during in-service workshops and teaching thousands of students a year about the importance of farming. During her last year as an Ag

Email: adc@chesco.org

Website: www.chesco.org/agdev

Lab employee, she estimates the Ag Lab program connected with over 110,000 kids across the state. Despite retiring in 2016, Ellis volunteers as the Chester Delaware County Farm Bureau Ag Lab board member liaison, ensuring that the Ag Lab continues to visit Chester County schools.

In addition to her Ag Lab work, Ellis also owns and operates Highspire Hills Farm in Glenmoore with her husband Duane. The farm currently provides over 3,000 dozen eggs a month to nine local restaurants, as well as to Kimberton Whole Foods markets. Somehow Ellis also finds time for her other passion, bringing her therapy dog Buttons to visit patients around the county at places including Chester County Hospital and the Neighborhood Hospice. Always modest about her service, Ellis' tireless efforts to benefit agriculture and her community speak for themselves.

"It might seem like just another day's work to Don and Deb, but they both provide for us in so many ways from growing the food we eat to serving as agricultural ambassadors in the community. We are delighted to honor them for all that they do," said Hillary Krummrich, Director of the Chester County Agricultural Development Council.

About the Awards

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.

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.

About the Chester County Agricultural Development Council

The Chester County Agricultural Development Council promotes agriculture in Chester County by raising awareness on issues regarding the viability of local agriculture and promoting agricultural excellence and farming. For more information, visit us at www.chesco.org/agdev, [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

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