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Press Release

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Commissioners celebrate 30th anniversary of Chester County's agricultural awards

*Awards go to Ar-Joy Farms in Cochranville and Charlie Graydus of Elverson
on National Farmer's Day*

WEST CHESTER, PA—The Chester County Commissioners, along with the Agricultural Development Council (Ag Council), presented two agricultural awards today at Ar-Joy Farms in Cochranville. It was also dual celebration of National Farmer's Day and the 30th year of the county's agricultural award program.

Farmers of the Year Award

The 2018 Farmers of the Year award was presented to dairy farmers Duane and Marilyn Hershey of Ar-Joy Farms in Cochranville, Pa., for the installation of cutting-edge methane digester technology on their farm, as well as for their strong advocacy work on behalf of the dairy industry both locally and nationwide.

Chester County Commissioners Michelle Kichline, Kathi Cozzone and Terence Farrell noted: "Duane and Marilyn Hershey embody the innovative, entrepreneurial spirit that the county's agricultural community is known for.

"Agriculture is Chester County's leading industry and our farmers work very hard to feed us and supply us with many materials that we need as a county, a state and a nation. After visiting the dairy operation at Ar-Joy Farms, we can see why Duane and Marilyn Hershey were selected as this year's award recipients. Their diligence and creativity in generating their own energy to run the farm is a great example of the way that many of our farms work to become sustainable and profitable."

Although methane digesters are a more common sight on farms throughout Europe, the Hershey's digester is one of a handful in Pennsylvania. "It took years of building relationships with PECO, potential funders at the state level and our neighbors to make it happen," said Marilyn Hershey.

The Hersheys use the digester to convert cow manure, snack chip waste from a local potato chip company and used frying oil from area restaurants into methane gas, which is then burned to generate energy. The digester produces enough energy to power their farm and provide a surplus which the Hersheys sell back to PECO. This additional income is especially important because it helps them weather challenging business conditions like the ones currently facing the dairy industry. The digester also produces additional byproducts including sterile bedding material for their cows and an odorless liquid fertilizer which is spread onto their crop fields.

In addition to running the 800-cow milking operation and raising crops on approximately 550 acres, the Hersheys operate their own milk hauling company in partnership with fellow dairy farmers Walt and Ellen Moore of Walmoore Holsteins. This venture has been working out well for both farms for more than ten years.

Off the farm, Duane and Marilyn are strong advocates for the dairy industry at the local, state and federal levels. Marilyn, who received the 2017 Dairy Woman of the Year by the World Dairy Expo, writes a monthly column for Hoard's Dairyman, serves on the National Dairy and Research Promotion Board, and is Chair of Dairy Management, Inc., the nation's dairy check off board for research and promotion. Duane serves on the national board of Land O'Lakes, the member-owned dairy cooperative that processes Ar-Joy Farms' milk into butter, chocolate and fluid milk. Despite their busy schedules, Duane and Marilyn regularly open their farm to visiting agricultural delegations and accept speaking engagements to help educate the public about the importance of dairy.

Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award

The Commissioners and the Ag Council presented the Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award to Charles "Charlie" Graydus, a beloved agricultural mechanics teacher and mentor at Octorara High School. Graydus started his teaching career in technical education at the Oxford School District in 1993. Six years later, he joined the agricultural mechanics department at Octorara High School where has been encouraging students to be their best and get involved in agriculture, regardless of whether or not they've grown up on a farm, for nearly the past two decades.

Complimenting his work as a teacher, Graydus has also served as the advisor for the school's Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter. Octorara FFA is the most active chapter in the county with students winning awards at the state level every year. Graydus also teaches a well-regarded multi-day tractor and farm safety class for teens, sponsored by Chester Delaware Farm Bureau. In these roles, he has helped thousands of high school students develop their potential for leadership, personal growth and career success in the agriculture industry and beyond.

Graydus and his wife Carla also raise a small herd of Black Angus beef cattle and champion pumpkins at Hidden Well Farm in Elverson, Pa.

"The Ag Council board members and I are delighted to recognize Charlie for all he has done and continues to do for our youth. Developing our agricultural workforce is of critical importance. These students will be the ones to grow our food and steward our natural resources for many years to come," says Ag Council Director Hillary Krummrich.

For more information about the Chester County Ag Council and our awards program, visit www.chesco.org/agdev

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