

# AG QUARTERLY

## January 2024



**BERKS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

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## WHAT WE DO

The Berks County Department of Agriculture promotes agriculture in Berks County by preserving farmland, invigorating agricultural economic development, and connecting our community to agricultural resources.

## WHO WE ARE

We are a department of the County of Berks, established in 2015 to serve Berks County residents. We are a team of eight staff who are dedicated to ensuring a thriving agricultural industry in Berks County.

### **Credits**

Cover photo at Bendy Brook Farm, Oley, PA, by Lylia Mast, granddaughter of operator.  
Content and editing provided by Berks County Dept. of Agriculture staff; design by Rick Royer, Berks County Planning.

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# PRESERVATION SPOTLIGHT

## R-Lost Creek Farm - Schlegel Family Settlement # 232 & 233



*"With farmland preservation and the excellent soils and weather, there will always be agriculture in Berks... We need a younger generation to become interested in production agriculture and the knowledge to be profitable."*

- The Schlegel family started R-Lost Creek Farm in 1935. The family patriarch Richard still works on the farm at 90 years old.
- Milk is sold to Land O' Lakes, and most of the crops grown, including corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay, are fed to their dairy animals.
- The family feels it is important to support local businesses for the farm inputs, including Oley Valley Feeds, Fisher and Thompson, IBA, and Premier Select Sire, and be involved in the local community through their church, the Grange, Farm Women, and 4-H.

**Please see our website for full articles on preserved farms.**

*Excerpts from "Still Farming at Ninety" By: Clyde A. B. Myers, originally published in the Reading Eagle.*

# AG LAND PRESERVATION STATS

2023 Report



## 2023 Totals:

- Farms preserved: **17**
- Acres preserved: **1,240.8**
- Modification requests: **24**
- Farms transferred: **46**
- County invested: **\$280K**
- State invested: **\$3.2M**

## Program Total:

- County invested: **\$84.6M**
- State invested: **\$93M**

# Q4 HIGHLIGHTS

## Farm Tire Collection Day

On November 9th the Department held a farm tire collection, in cooperation with The Berks County Conservation District. The event was held at Allegheny Towing and Salvage Co. in Birdsboro. The main purpose of the collection was to reduce breeding areas for mosquitos and help alleviate the financial burden for farmers to dispose of used farm tires. In total 39,760 lbs. (19.88 tons) of large tractor and truck tires were collected. The tires will be recycled to make rubber playground mulch. This event was a huge success and plans are already underway to conduct another collection this fall.



# Q4 HIGHLIGHTS

## Ag & Natural Resources Career & Job Fair

Our largest career/job fair to date was held at the Leesport Farmer's Market on November 9th. We had the opportunity to interact with over 230 local high school and college students, as well as adult job seekers. This event showcased 35 exhibitors highlighting diverse employment opportunities in ag and ag-adjacent fields. Our partners included local government and non-profit organizations, universities, businesses, local school districts and the Berks County Intermediate Unit.



# Q4 HIGHLIGHTS



## B.A.R.N.'s Farm to Fork Event

We had the privilege of joining B.A.R.N (Berks Agricultural Resource Network) for their Farm to Fork Fundraiser at Reinhart's Christmas Tree Farm on October 10th. Dinner consisted of a Mac & Cheese Bar and plenty of desserts, with most ingredients provided by local Berks County farms and businesses. Days of Old entertained with Bluegrass & Folk music.



## GRCA Awards

The Berks County Dept. of Ag nominated BAD Farm for an agribusiness award which was awarded on October 25th. The event spotlights and celebrates innovation, positive economic growth and development through construction projects across Berks County. BAD Farm is located in Kempton and recently expanded their operation.

# Q4 HIGHLIGHTS

## Urban Ag Forum

The Urban Ag Forum was hosted at the Berks County Agricultural Center. Local and state government officials engaged with community members to highlight the success and future of urban agriculture.



## Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training

On October 19th, the Department joined USDA, Penn State University, and the State Conservation Commission to celebrate the opening of a new center to promote agriculture conservation in Pennsylvania, which is located in State College.



# Q4 IN NUMBERS



Reach: **22,826**  
Total followers: **952**  
New followers: **67**  
Posts: **84**



**50**  
Students visited  
agribusiness



**238**  
Attendees at Ag Career  
& Job Fair

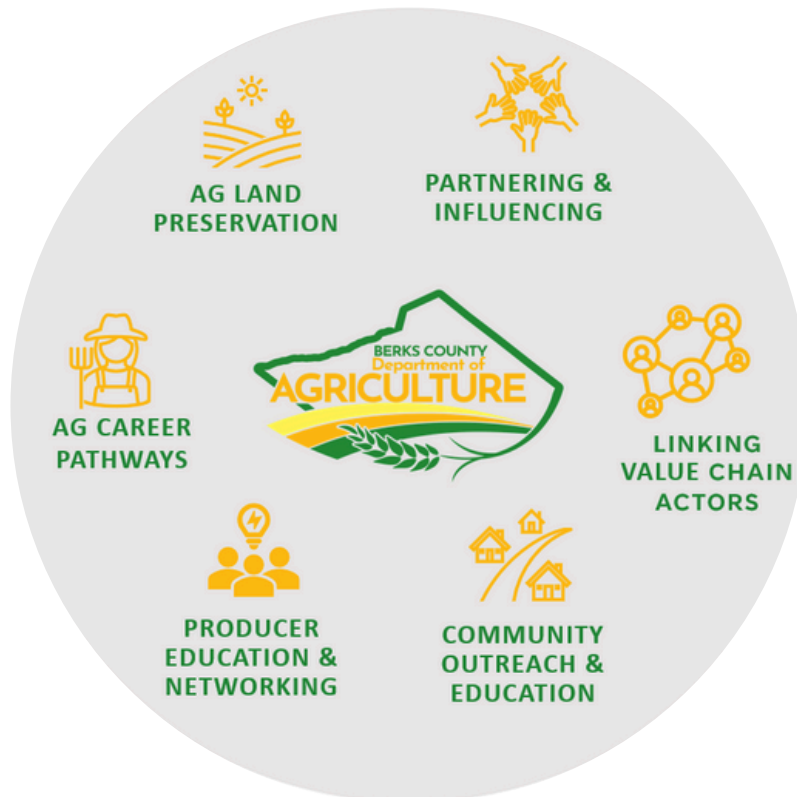


# 2024 OBJECTIVES

## Annual Plan

Three broad objectives have been identified for 2024 that continue to align with our strategic functions and forge the way for new opportunities in the future. Selected key activities are included here.

### Strategic Functions of the Berks County Department of Agriculture



Want to know more? Don't hesitate to reach out - we'd love to hear from you.

### 1. Continue strengthening the agricultural land preservation program.

- Integrate data and workflows for utilization in Landscape software package.
- Optimize easement stewardship utilizing new resources.
- Integration into new PA Farmland system (State-level system).

### 2. Refining Department of Agriculture's strategy, function, and branding.

- Co-facilitate the Berks County Ag Study with consultant ACDS.
- Integrate CRM software and establish communication lists and content.
- Refine internal processes and systems.

### 3. Continue the Dept. of Agriculture's community outreach.

- Expand departmental website to include farmer resources & regularly updated information.
- Continue hosting and partnering on events for career pathway development, education, and community outreach.

# UPCOMING...



## Ag Literacy Week | March 11-15, 2024

**Audience:** K-2 grade classrooms

**Description:** Statewide program where volunteers read an agriculture-themed book to K-2 classrooms, then facilitate a discussion and activity with the students. Books are gifted to each classroom.

**Partners:** PA Friends of Agriculture Foundation; B.A.R.N as sponsor and coordinator for Berks County.

## National Ag Day - Historic Mill Lecture & Tour | March 19, 2024

**Audience:** General public interested in historic agricultural structures.

**Description:** Listen to a lecture about the restoration of Bobb's Mill, then enjoy lunch and a tour of the restored historic building.

**Partners:** local historical societies, America 250PA.

## Superintendents' Agribusiness Tour | March 20, 2024

**Audience:** Berks superintendents and BCIU staff

**Description:** A visit to Brown's Feed Mill (Birdsboro) and the Kurtland Farm, a robotic dairy operation, to showcase diversity and technology in the agricultural industry and ag careers.

**Partners:** Berks County Intermediate Unit; school districts; agribusinesses.

Would you like to partner with us for future events? Give us a call or email us: 610-378-1844 or [DeptofAg@countyofberks.com](mailto:DeptofAg@countyofberks.com)



CELEBRATE NATIONAL AG  
DAY  
AND AMERICA 250



# HISTORIC MILL LECTURE AND TOUR

Save the  
date!  
Free and  
open to  
the  
public.



MARCH 19, 2024

FREE EVENT  
LUNCH INCLUDED

Please call 610-378-1844 to Register

10:30 am - Lecture

12:00 pm - Lunch

1:00 pm - Tour of Bobb's Mill (busing provided)

Boyertown area



## Schuylkill Action Network (SAN) Celebrates 20 Years Improving Watershed



- The Schuylkill Watershed encompasses 2,000 square miles of forest, wildlife habitat, and open space.
- It includes seven counties: Schuylkill, Lehigh, Berks, Lebanon, Montgomery, Bucks & Chester.
- SAN's mission is to improve water resources through collaborative action in the Schuylkill River Watershed.

On November 3rd, SAN celebrated 20 years of working together to improve the Schuylkill River Watershed. The group is made up of many organizations throughout seven different counties, including Conservation Districts, Philadelphia Water Dept., PA DEP, AQUA, and many others. The group helps with collaborative funding for projects to improve water quality.

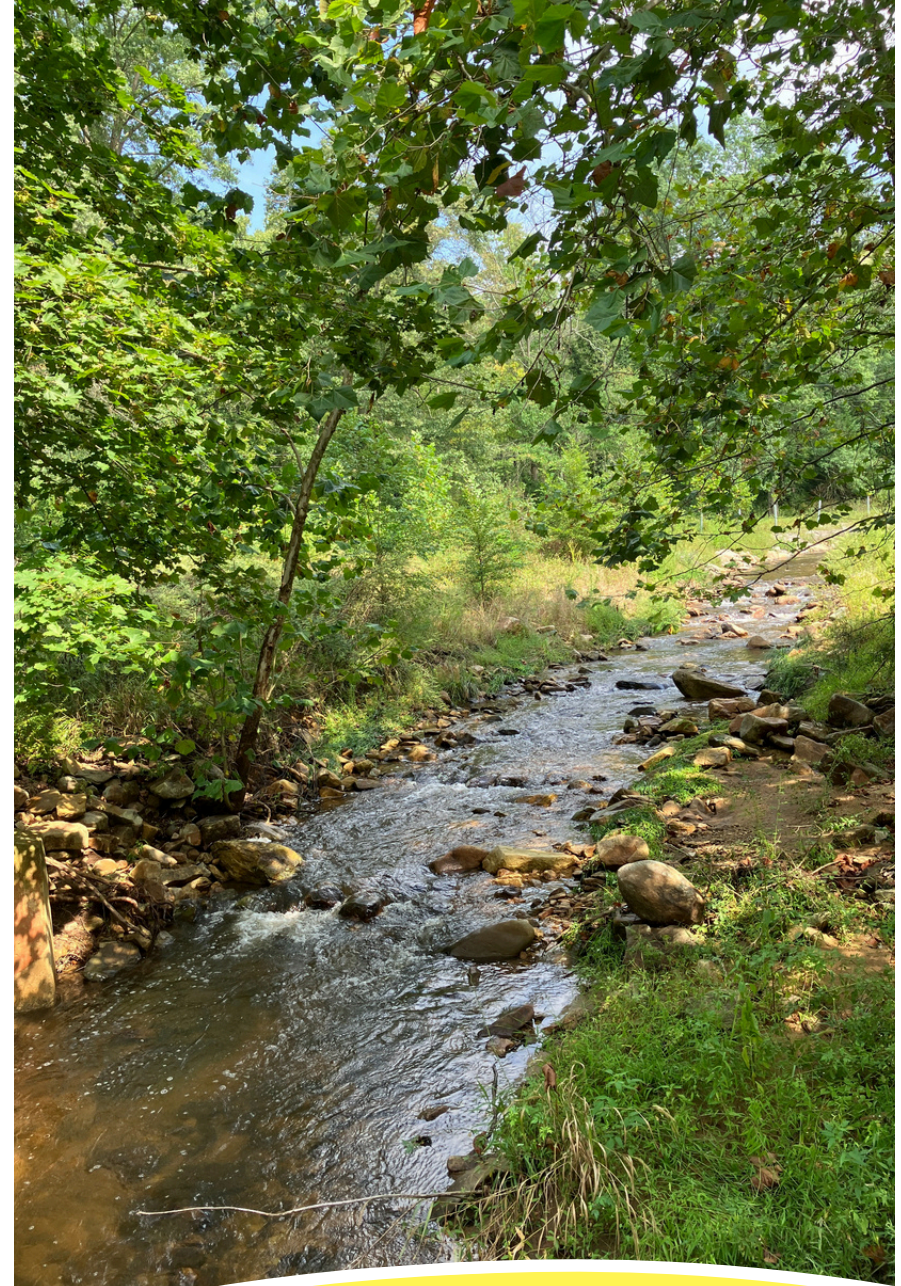
Many projects have been completed here in Berks County including stream bank fencing, heavy use areas, manure storages, and stream crossings on farms. The Department's own Kim Fies is co-chair for agriculture and has been a staple of the organization for many years.



The article and more information can be found at:  
<https://www.schuylkillwaters.org/about-us/our-mission>

# BERKS COUNTY AG FACT

In 2023, The Berks County Dept of Ag has worked with partnering agencies (NRCS, BCCD & Berks Nature) to identify potential participants and promote programs that allocated over **\$7 million dollars** to farmers in Berks for the installation of best management practices to address resource concerns.





**CONTACT US OR STOP BY!**

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