

AG QUARTERLY

July 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

Content and editing by Berks County Dept. of Agriculture staff; template design by Rick Royer, Berks County Planning.

CONTENT

Preservation Spotlight.....	2
Triple R Farms - Rebman & Reed Families	
Ag Land Preservation Stats.....	3
Q2 Highlights.....	4
Our Work in Numbers.....	6
2024 Objectives.....	7
Upcoming.....	8
Ag Newsflash.....	9
Berks County Duck Farm Expanding	
Berks County Ag Fact.....	10



PRESERVATION SPOTLIGHT

Triple R Farms - Rebman & Reed Families Settlement #644

Excerpts from "Berks Farm Families Find Their Niche" by Clyde A. B. Myers, originally published in the Reading Eagle.

- The Rebman and Reed families own and operate Triple R Farms, also known as Over Home Alpacas, on 120 acres where they grow crops like hay, alfalfa, corn, wheat, and soybeans, and raise over 100 Suri Alpacas.
- Five generations have worked on the farm, which was purchased by the family in 1929. The farm was preserved in 2013.
- The alpacas were added in 2008 as a way to diversify the farming operation. Alpaca fiber is softer and lighter than wool and is hypoallergenic. The fiber is processed at a Berks County mill and yarn is sold at their farm store.



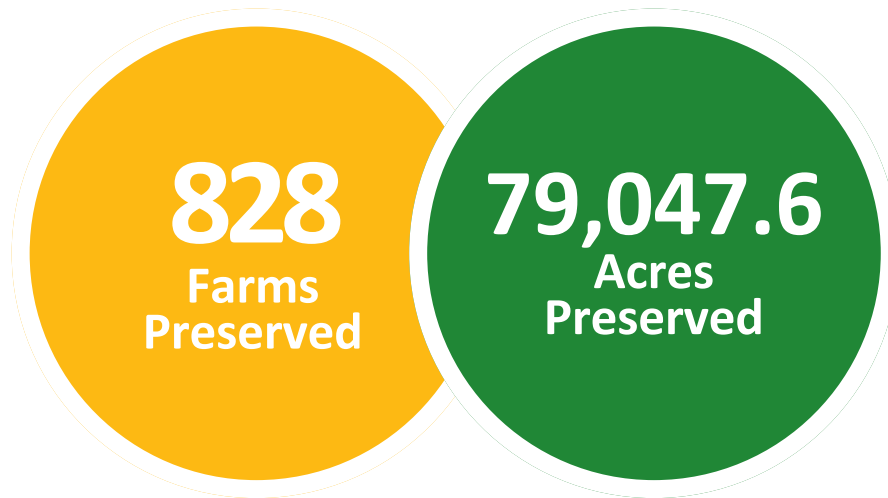
When asked about the future of agriculture in Berks County, Carol Reed said:

"Preserving the farmland that is left and using sustainable farming practices...the ability to adapt is the keystone to farming. Adding alpacas to our farm has been an adventure and we are eager to see what future generations will bring to our family operation"

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

AG LAND PRESERVATION STATS

3



2024 YTD:

Farms preserved: 6
Acres preserved: **503.2**
Modification requests: **10**
Farms transferred: **33**
County invested: **\$618,709**
State invested: **\$ \$779,775**

2024 Committed Funding:

County: **\$1,083,377.00**
State: **\$2,411,601.69**
Total: **\$3,494,978.69**

2024 Easement Purchase Cap: **\$2,800 /acre**

The purchase value of the easement is the difference between the market value and the farm value of the land. The maximum easement purchase amount, “the cap”, remains consistent with appraisal values in Berks County.

Q2 HIGHLIGHTS

BCCD Legislative Breakfast

On June 14, staff attended the Berks County Conservation District Legislative Breakfast held at the Phillips Farm. It was a great morning to be with supporting cooperating agencies and getting word out about the Department of Ag at an event hosted on a preserved farm!



Deputy Director Kim Fies talking about Phillips' preserved farm

Support for Local Ag Events

The Department continued to promote local agriculture and ag education, supporting the Kutztown and Oley FFA Banquets and the Kempton Fair and participating in the Daniel Boone High School Career Fair.



9 Buckets Urban Gardening Workshop

The Department collaborated with 3 partner organizations to kick off a pilot program aimed at increasing whole fresh food consumption in household limited by growing space. Each family went home with nine 5-gallon buckets planted with vegetables & flowers.



Q2 HIGHLIGHTS

5

Ag in the Classroom 2024



A group of 12 teachers representing 5 different school districts joined us for the department's Ag in the Classroom event, which highlights the food and fiber system. The three-day event included visits to over 14 different operations in the county highlighting all the diversity Berks County offers. Participants visited operations including: Kellerlands Apiary, Frecon Orchards, Fisher's Produce, Castanea Farms, Twilight Acres, Ryland Gardens, Berks Packing, Tom Sturgis, and others.

OUR WORK IN NUMBERS



Reach: **21,463**

Total followers: **1,024**

New followers: **60**

Posts: **41**



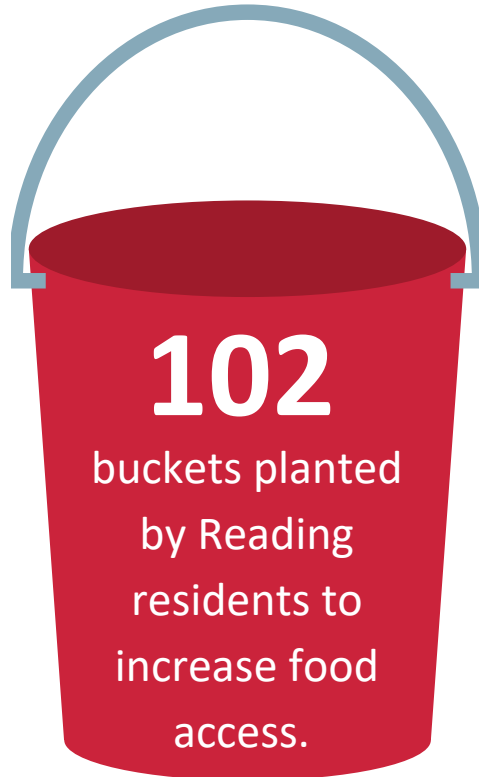
1,139

Food map
views



12,653

Grow Together
website
views



102

buckets planted
by Reading
residents to
increase food
access.



Ag Event Calendar

4,973 views

188 events posted



12

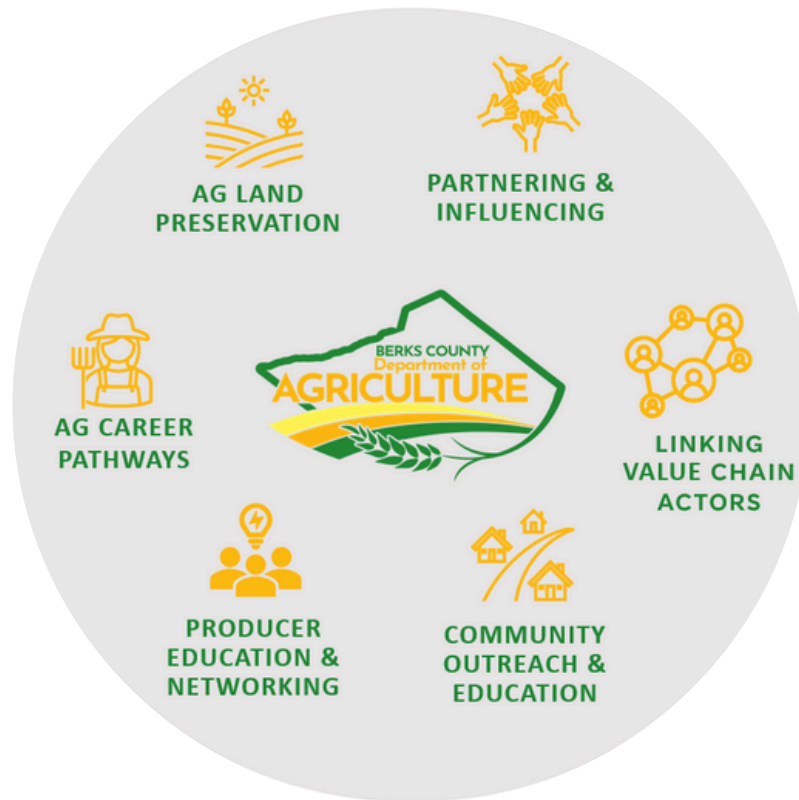
teachers
observed ag
careers first-
hand.

2024 OBJECTIVES

Second Quarter Update

Our team has continued to make key advances on all three of our annual objectives in 2024.

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.

- Landscape software:
 - Data verification ongoing
 - Continuing to refine processes and procedures
- Staff attended PFPA and WeConserve PA conferences to advance program knowledge and collaboration.

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

- Berks County Ag Study: 4 focus groups held, data reviewed, advisory committee being assembled.
- Icon development in process.

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

- Held successful Ag in the Classroom event, educating teachers from 5 county school districts.
- Promoted agriculture and agricultural careers at events including the Kempton Fair, Kutztown and Oley FFA Banquets, and Daniel Boone High School Career Fair.

July is
National Ice Cream
Month!



Berks County Ag Center Ice Cream Social | July 25, 2024

Audience: County staff and ag professionals

Description: Agencies in the Ag Center gather to eat ice-cream and network

Partners: USDA, BCCD, Penn State Extension, County of Berks

Inside Berks Business | August 7, 2024

Audience: Teachers

Description: A one-day tour of the agribusiness industry of Berks County for teachers to better understand agribusiness and career opportunities for their students.

Partners: Berks Business Education Coalition; 3 agribusinesses of Berks.

Agriculture & Natural Resources Career & Job Fair | November 14, 2024

Audience: High school & college students, adults of all education levels.

Description: Career and job fair focused on careers in the agriculture and natural resources fields. Attendees will find potential internships, job shadowing, and current or future employment opportunities.

Partners: Local agribusinesses, government agencies, and colleges.

Would you like to partner with us for future events? Give us a call or email us: 610-378-1844 or DeptofAg@BerksPA.gov

Berks County Duck Farm Expanding into Western US and Mexico

Joey Jurgielewicz has been growing his duck business substantially over the years. Their home farm is based in Hamburg and now the family operation is expanding into Mexico's top destination areas as a delicacy. The company processes about 6 million Pekin ducks at its processing plant in Hamburg. Mexico is one of the top five importers of ducks in the world. Most of the ducks will be for resorts and restaurants offering fine dining experiences.

The company is also expanding to Colorado and the Rocky Mountain Region after partnering with Seattle Fish Company and Lombardi Brothers Meats. This expansion requires a production increase of 4-5% in 2024 and again in 2025. This also requires more contract growers (farmers) both in PA and also surrounding states.

There could also be more growth in the near future as the Jurgielewicz's hope to make duck a normal meal option on the dinner table since it has a perfect meat-to-fat ratio. Jurgielewicz Duck Farm is a great example of how ag businesses are helping contribute to Berks County and PA's economic value. Currently they employ over 200 people at the plant and have 25 contract growers for the company.

"When we're able to expand, it benefits Pennsylvania agriculture and the economy," he said. "If it's a top restaurant in Singapore or Cancun, this all originates right here in Berks County."-Joey Jurgielewicz



Source: https://www.lancasterfarming.com/farming-news/poultry/berks-county-duck-operation-expands-into-mexico-rocky-mountains/article_0c25874e-2353-11ef-b3ce-73f0d7d1894c.html

BERKS COUNTY AG FACT

\$701 million

'Market Value of
Agricultural Products Sold'
in Berks County.



Berks County ranks
#3 of 67 counties in PA and
#104 of 3,078 counties in the U.S
for Market Value of Agricultural
Product Sold.

Source: 2022 National Ag Census



CONTACT US OR STOP BY!

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