From Your Commissioner

Kreider Farms Manheim, PA

Last week was the annual meeting of the Northeast Association of States Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA), which took place in Hershey, PA, the home of Hershey Chocolate. For me, the best part of the meetings is always the agricultural tour. While we made several noteworthy stops, including one at an equipment dealership that is housed in a new building which is over 200,000 square feet, I will focus on Kreider Farms.

The Kreider Family traces their roots on the original farm back to 1736, when Christian Hershey purchased 400 acres. Fast forward to 1927, when Mary Hershey married Noah Kreider. In 1935, Mary’s father decided it was time to put the farm up for sale and retire. Two members of the family wanted to purchase the farm, but rather than decide which family member should purchase it, John Hershey put the farm up for public auction. Noah and Mary were the successful bidders and Kreider Farms was born. If you are wondering, Milton Hershey of Hershey Chocolate was a distant cousin, and he did attend a family reunion held on the farm in 1905.

Noah took out a mortgage to buy the farm, but he also borrowed enough money to purchase the first tractor used in Manheim. His neighbors all thought he was foolish, until they saw how much work he could get done with it. They soon started to hire him to do field work for them. This allowed him to pay off the mortgage years ahead of schedule and begin the expansion of the farm. Today, the farms consist of about 3,000 acres.

We began our tour at the farm’s welcome center, where visitors can board a trolley bus for a tour of the farm. We stayed on our coach bus and proceeded on. We then did something I never thought I would be doing; we drove right down the center aisle of the maternity barn. I don’t know how long that barn is, but as you can see from the picture it is pretty dang big. It certainly needs to be, to support a milking herd of 1,700 cows.

After our drive through the barn, we got off the bus and went to the milking facility. The cows are milked on a carousel that holds 54 and takes 11 minutes to complete a rotation. There are two points of observation for guests. One is from the outside of the building where we are close enough to be in danger from the effects of a wet tail and the other is from a second story glassed-in room which provides a full view of the carousel. It is impressive to see the cows enter the moving platform in the brief time they have and then, 11 minutes later, see them quickly back out at just the right time.

This is a diversified operation, and they are also the largest egg producer in Pennsylvania. Due to biosecurity concerns over avian influenza, we did not get to see that part of the operation, but the poultry houses are located on the same site as the dairy barns.

The picture included with this article was taken from the top of a 100-foot-high concrete silo that was moved 600 feet a few years ago, and retrofitted with a 172-step exterior staircase and an observation deck. The cost of
the project was $1 million, with no expected economic benefit to the operation, but it is an incredible way to showcase the farm.

The farm has their own branded products. They bottle their milk and juices, and make their own ice cream. On the poultry side of things, they also market Noah’s Pride cage-free and organic cage-free eggs. They also have begun production of Chiques Creek hemp tea and hemp eggs. The hens are fed hemp seed meal, which has three times more omega three than other eggs. At the present time, their eggs can only be sold in Pennsylvania. If that weren’t enough, they also manufacture potting soil made of dehydrated chicken and cow manure.

This is a farm well worth visiting, even if you have to pay the $15 they charge for the tour.

Shawn N. Jasper-Commissioner