

2019 PYFA WINTER CONFERENCE

The PA Young Farmers Association met for the annual winter conference Feb. 5-7, 2019, at the Best Western Plus and Country Cupboard, hosted by the Mifflinburg Chapter Young Farmers.

Workshops were presented Tuesday afternoon, the first by Lucas Criswell on Ag Leader Precision Farming. Criswell talked about the benefits of auto-steer in reducing driver fatigue and overlap of seed, spray, and fertilizer.

Alan Ard of Ard's Farm Market talked about their business with the farm market, restaurant, corn maze, pumpkins, catering, and wedding venue. He spoke on his experience with cover crops and companion planting. Their business is all about Farm – Food – Family.

Dave Hackenberg told about his Apiary business, trucking bees all across the U.S. for pollination. Pollinators are struggling which should concern all of us because one out of every three bites of food is produced through pollination. Hackenberg said pollinators bring back chemical residues on pollen, not enough to kill the bees right away but later when it is concentrated in the hive. Honeybees are the barometer of the environment.



The evening banquet was held at Silver Moon banquet hall. Alyssa Collins, Director of the Southeast Agricultural Research and Extension farm and professor of plant pathology, talked about the history of hemp and research she has conducted at the farm over the last few years. Hemp was brought to the U.S. in 1606 but was banned in 1938 because of its similarity to marijuana. Hemp has hundreds of uses, mainly grouped by seed, fiber, and pharmaceuticals. Josh Liedecker, a local farmer, told about his personal experience in growing hemp as one of the research project farms. Since the 2018 Farm Bill was passed, PA now allows growing unlimited acreage of hemp with a state permit. It can be used for anything except animal feed.



Tours on Wednesday visited the Little League Museum, South Williamsport, showing the history of Little League, first organized in 1939. The museum shows many original uniforms, balls, bats and gloves, as well as famous people who played Little League in their youth.



The second tour stop was the International Harvester Museum in Millville, housed in an original prototype dealership building. It was full of antique tractors and featured the parts and repair departments with original stock of parts. Last tour stop was Fero Vineyard, producing many types of wines from grapes grown on the property.

PA Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and State Representative Fred Keller were guests at the Wednesday evening banquet at the Country Cupboard Restaurant. Tyler Jarrett of Mifflinburg Young Farmers received the Outstanding Young Farmer Over 30 award. Elvin Stoltzfus, owner of Pik-Rite Manufacturing, was awarded the Outstanding Agri-Business award. Stephen Kline of Mifflinburg Young Farmers received the Outstanding Young Farmer Advisor award. Robert Pardoe Jr. was recognized with the Richard Hoppes Memorial Award for his many years of dedication to the Young Farmers organization. A lively auction followed, conducted by auctioneer Lori Hess.

Thursday's breakfast speaker was Tony Noll who spoke about the process of having his family farm placed on the National Historic Register in 2016 as the Noll-Spangler Farm. The many original farm outbuildings assisted in the successful nomination of the 110 acre farm purchased by the Noll family in 1963. An annual program demonstrating historic agriculture is held each year, this year on July 27th.

Wrapping up the conference was a tour of Pik-Rite Manufacturing, a company founded on construction of tomato harvesting equipment. Today they build all types of harvesting equipment, tank trucks, and spreaders with 95% American components. Pik-Rite has 96 employees and ship their equipment to 27 different countries.

Next year's PYFA winter conference will be held Feb. 4-6, 2020, in Lebanon, hosted by the Cedar Crest Young Farmers. PYFA members are working hard on plans for hosting the National Young Farmers Educational Institute December 11-14 in Lancaster, PA.