

PYFA 2024 Winter Conference – Lewisburg

The 2024 PYFA Winter Conference was hosted by the Mifflinburg Young Farmers at the Best Western Hotel and Silver Moon Banquet Hall in Lewisburg PA February 8-10, 2024.

The conference began with the board meeting Thursday evening. Tours departed at 9 am Friday, beginning at Bright Farms, a hydroponic greenhouse with four acres of lettuce and basil under roof. Bright Farms has six locations in the U.S, with Selinsgrove being the largest. This location supplies fresh basil and six types of lettuce year-round to the Philadelphia and New York markets. From seeding to harvest, it takes 14-21 days depending on the variety.



The next stop was Weaver's Archery, opened in 2008 by the Weaver family with a shooting range and store with all things relating to archery and bowfishing. Their busy season is July through October, but they are open all year with a techno-hunt room and archery competitions in the winter.



Members next traveled to SUN Tech school for a delicious lunch prepared by the culinary students. This career & technical school serves Snyder, Union, and Northumberland counties with 19 programs available to mostly high school seniors. Students served as tour guides, beginning in the diesel mechanic program where students become state inspection certified and can do co-op programs in industry, preparing them for immediate careers. Other programs include cosmetology, health professions, HVAC,

electrical, carpentry, masonry, and many others. All the students we spoke to were excited and happy to be there.



The last stop of the tour was Old Mill Creamery, where we enjoyed fresh made ice cream and a tour of their milk and ice cream processing facility. The family milks 60 cows, selecting genetics for A2-A2 milk which is helpful for lactose intolerance. The business is housed in a 190 year old mill in a beautiful setting beside the mill race.



The Friday evening banquet featured speaker PA Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding, who reviewed the Governor's budget just released this week, emphasizing innovation, economic development planning, and site readiness for new businesses. The local school Superintendent and Principal were guests for the evening. Dr. John Ewing from Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Center for Professional Personnel Development, also brought greetings, and the evening wrapped up with entertainment from the band Eighty-6.



The annual delegates meeting took place Saturday morning, with election of new officers for the year. Workshops filled the afternoon, with the first being Jonathan Guseman from the National Weather Service. He spoke on first frost and last frost dates, degree days, fire weather, and available resources from the NWS for rural residents, including WARN, Weather Awareness for a Rural Nation.



David Hoover from Spruce Run Farm has raised reindeer since 2015, currently owning seven. His busy season for agritourism events is November-December. He brought one of his beautiful, friendly animals to meet us.

The third workshop featured Dave Hackenberg, major beekeeper in the area. His bees travel to seven states, from Florida to Maine, and sometimes California. He spoke about colony collapse disorder, which was first

noticed in 2006, and other diseases and problems for honeybees. He showed a film which he appeared in that discusses the dangers of crop chemicals to bees.

Saturday night was the annual awards banquet. Hoover Tractor LLC of Mifflinburg received the Agri-Business award. Lenny and April Wagman of the Hometown Eatery were selected as Honorary Young Farmers for their generosity in hosting the Mifflinburg Young Farmers meetings for several years. The Richard Hoppes Memorial Award was given to Steve Kline, long time advisor of the Mifflinburg YF Chapter and PYFA board member, and his wife DeElma.



New officers for 2024 were announced: President Anthony Dietrich, Past President Michelle Dietrich, President Elect Keith Weimer, Secretary Tammy Rentzel, Treasurer Ed Zug, PR Denise Leydig, Membership Debbie Zug, Eastern VP Linda Krall, South Central VP Jason Rentzel, Northern VP Matt Dersham, and Executive Secretary Betsy Huber. The Western VP will be filled by the board.

Next year's PYFA Winter Conference will be February 6-8, 2025, hosted by Shippensburg Young Farmers.

