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Maryland farmers innovation honored nationally

Prince George's County Farm Bureau in spotlight

Prince George's County Farm Bureau is one of 25 county Farm Bureaus from across the country recognized by the American Farm Bureau Federation for innovative program ideas in this year's County Activities of Excellence program. The winners will be spotlighted during AFBF's 93rd annual meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii Jan. 8-11.

The purpose of the program is to recognize and share successful county Farm Bureau programs and activities. The awards honor innovative programs by county Farm Bureaus in five categories: Education & Agriculture Promotion; Leadership Development; Membership Services; Policy Implementation; and Public Relations & Information.

Prince George's County Farm Bureau President Yates Clagett, with the help of county secretary Jennifer Cross, entered the member services division of the competition with the group's meat freezer trailer and display case project under the title of "Small Meat Producers Find their Niche."

In their application, they say, "We obtained a grant from our regional agriculture development commission to purchase a freezer trailer and two display freezer cases. The trailer is shared by the farmers for transporting meats, and the display cases are in retail establishments solely for branded meats. Our trailer and display cases were coordinated with another organization to establish cooperative branding with a logo, labeling and promotion of meats meeting defined expectations and quality standards."

Sharing the freezer trailer and display cases has made it possible for farmers to raise animals that can be processed and safely transported and sold as a "local" product. "We finally could help farmers market their product," Clagett said.

“It’s become difficult for farmers to stay in business, especially in a state with pressures from development and regulation,” the president said. “Farmers are trying desperately to diversify and get creative so that they can stay on the land and stay in business.”

Clagett said the winning project was nothing more than following the mission of Farm Bureau – to promote and protect Maryland agriculture and rural life. “Farm Bureau is here to help its members and go the extra mile to find ways to work together and be profitable. Everybody wants these beautiful farms to stay in the area, but if they aren’t making money, they won’t be here long.”

In the application, they said: “Our local meat producers have established a cooperative that identifies product quality for raising their animals in a humane, natural and supplemental-free manner; and the processing needs to be at a USDA-inspected facility that is compliant with DHMH on-farm processor licensing. The branding process has established a product logo and packaging, a slogan and a website for communicating the information about the farms, the products, the producer quality standards and the retail locations.”

“The freezer trailer became available to the producers at the beginning of June 2011. The trailer is averaging a weekly usage by producers for transporting their meats from the processor to the retail establishments,” according to Mrs. Cross. “The trailer is being used repeatedly by the meat producers. We have received delivery of one of our freezers display cases, and it is in use at a retail establishment. Another one is expected for delivery soon. A launch campaign was held in July 2011 to promote locally grown meat.

“The program is new, but it is generating excitement for a niche market that seems quite profitable,” she continued. “Overall, a small group of meat producers are working cooperatively as a result of the efforts of our Farm Bureau.”

“Farm Bureau members attending AFBF’s annual meeting in Hawaii in January will see first-hand how these 25 action-oriented programs do a great job in fulfilling Farm Bureau’s mission,” said AFBF President Bob Stallman. “The winning entries will be on display at the trade show where county Farm Bureau leaders from across America can discover what other county Farm Bureaus are doing to promote agriculture in their communities.”

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