

PA Environment Digest

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American Farmland Trust Honors Franklin County Farmer With Local Hero Award

Franklin County farmer John Koons, Sr. was honored Thursday with a Local Hero Award from the [American Farmland Trust](#) (AFT) and the [Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Association](#) for his more than 60 years of dedication to his dairy farm, farmland preservation and land conservation.

The award was presented by Andrew McElwaine, AFT President and CEO, during a special celebration marking the 25th anniversary of Pennsylvania's Farmland Preservation Program at Spring House Farm owned by Jere and Angie Hissong in Mercersburg, Pa.

[Click Here](#) to watch Mr. McElwaine's remarks.

(Photo: LtoR- Andrew McElwaine, award winners John & Doris Koons, Ellen Dayhoff, President PA Farmland Preservation Association, Matt Knepper, Director of the Lancaster County Farmland Preservation Program an incoming President of the PA Farmland Preservation Association.)

The American Farmland Trust is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices and keeping farmers on the land.

"John and Doris Koons and their family represent the rock on which agriculture in the United State is built," said McElwaine. "Through his leadership, John Koons has set an example for other farmers to follow in preserving farmland, conserving soil and land and protecting Pennsylvania's water resources.

"John began no-till farming in 1969, long before others, becoming a demonstration site Penn State University used to teach others," noted McElwaine. "In 1992 he became the first farmer in Franklin County to preserve his farm; in fact, his was the 100th farm preserved in Pennsylvania.

"He continued his leadership by serving on the Franklin County Agricultural Land Preservation Board for nine years and was a speaker at a National No-Tillage Conference," said McElwaine.

On behalf of AFT, McElwaine congratulated Pennsylvania's Farmland Preservation Program for leading the Nation in land conserved, but noted Pennsylvania needs to fully support its award-winning program.

“As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Pennsylvania’s Farmland Preservation Program and the fact that more than 480,146 acres and 4,492 farms have been permanently preserved here, we cannot forget farms are protected one at a time,” said McElwaine. “I am very glad we can recognize this anniversary today with one of the early leaders in this effort.”

Koons began farming with 111 acres and milking 17 cows near Waynesboro. Over the years his farming operation grew to include 700 acres supporting a dairy herd of more than 100 cows. Three of his farms are preserved totaling 213 acres.

His farm was always a family business with his children and grandchildren helping out. In recent years, the operation has been turned over to his son, John Koons, Jr., with the hope the third generation of the Koons family will take over in the future.

“While we celebrate today, we cannot forget Pennsylvania is [losing 40 acres](#) of valuable farmland per day and our 62,000 hardworking farmers face significant challenges to stay on the land,” said McElwaine. “Farmers need all the help and support we can give them because they produce something we all need-- food.”

“As we stand here today, the federal government has been shut down for 10 days and, worse for farmers, the farm programs we all rely on have been erased by the failure of Congress to pass a new Farm Bill,” said McElwaine.

“American Farmland Trust believes this lack of action is causing significant confusion in the farm economy and uncertainty among farmers who rely on these programs to operate efficiently and economically,” said McElwaine. “Ultimately, we fear, the price of these twin failures will be seen by every consumer in the supermarket checkout line.

“AFT has called on Congress to fund the government and to pass a comprehensive five-year Farm Bill,” said McElwaine. “This should be a no-brainer.

“I want to thank the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Association and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture for their leadership on farm preservation and wish them continued success in the future,” said McElwaine.

Since its founding in 1980 by a group of farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, the American Farmland Trust has helped save millions of acres of farmland from development and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more.

For more information on the policies and programs of the American Farmland Trust, visit www.farmland.org, follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AmericanFarmland or Twitter www.twitter.com/farmland.

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