2018 Ag Tour to visit four farms

Agriculture is one of the primary industries in our area. Years ago, many of us had direct experience with a farm owned by our parents, grandparents, or other relatives. Today, however, many individuals have no connection with a farm.

Social media is loaded with incorrect and misleading information about modern agriculture. Unfortunately, even some restaurant chains and grocery stores have taken advantage of this misinformation in their marketing messages.

Area residents have an opportunity to learn firsthand about local agriculture by participating in the 2018 Ag Tour. The Agri-Business Committee of the Findlay-Hancock County Chamber of Commerce has arranged to visit four diverse agriculture enterprises.

On this tour, participants will be able to visit a large livestock operation, a modern grain farm using practices to reduce the potential of nutrients getting to Lake Erie, and a small farm that raises grapes and has its own winery. The tour is open to city and rural individuals.

The first stop is Natural Choice Dairy near Alger. This large dairy has more than 4,000 Holstein cows. Cows are milked three times each day — 100 cows at a time with a state-of-the-art rotating milking parlor. Participants will be able to see its operations including sanitation procedures, animal health practices, and managing animal waste.

Currently, the dairy industry is the most economically depressed sector in agriculture.

Several dairies have gone out of business in northwestern Ohio. See how one dairy is being competitive in this tough business cycle.

The second stop is a breeder pork facility. Years ago, the pork industry became integrated, causing many independent producers to get out of the hog business. Today, most of the pork industry is contract operations, with producers raising pigs for livestock enterprises such as Cooper, Hord, or Kalmbach.

Innovative pork producers have stayed in the business with niche markets. Lean Value Sires is one of these operations (http://www.leanvaluasures.com).

They raise boars for the show/pig genetic market. Individuals wanting to raise champion pigs will use artificial insemination with genetic material collected from prize boars.

Lean Value Sires has 65 stud boars from eight different breeds. The company has been in business for 25 years. Rusty and Alissa Bingham bought the business three years ago and brought it to Hardin County. Individuals will be able to see the operations, including champion boars.

Another example of innovative agriculture is the Ravenshurst Champaign Cellar, owned by Chuck and Nina Harris (http://oij.com/2018/01/bells-and-whistles-are-few-but-quality-is-elite-at-ravenshurst-champagne-cellars/). They have taken a small acreage and made it into a successful enterprise.

Heerseys bought five acres and established a vineyard of European grapes such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in 1980. Later they added 15 more acres. They started making commercial wine and champagne in 1997 and started the winery in 1999.

Besides seeing the operations and vineyards, participants will be able to sample and buy their award-winning wines and champagne.

The last stop, Kurt Farms, is a 470-acre corn and soybean farm utilizing conservation practices to reduce nutrient losses from fields. Kurt Farms is located near Dunkirk and is owned and operated by Chris Kurt.

Chris has committed 168 acres to the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network (https://blancharddemonfarms.org/#tour360-kurt).

Blanchard River Demonstration Farms were established to show the public the practices that farmers use to decrease nutrient loss from fields. Practices that can be seen on the farm include a two-stage ditch, phosphorus-removal beds, filter strips, edge of field monitoring, drainage water management, and cover crops.

Participants will be able to see how these practices reduce nutrient loss, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen. Some of these systems are part of Ohio State University research to quantify how much benefit a farmer will receive from a specific practice.

The tour will be all day from 7:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 20. A charter bus will depart from and return to the Hancock County Agricultural Service Center, 7868 County Road 140, Findlay.

Tour tickets may be purchased for $20 at the Findlay-Hancock County Chamber of Commerce office, 123 E. Main St., Findlay, Lunch, refreshments, and an industry gift bag will be provided for participants. Wine tasting is available for an additional fee.

This trip will be a great opportunity to learn about the agriculture industry in northwestern Ohio. Individuals will be able to see firsthand how local agricultural enterprises are community oriented, sustainably minded, and environmentally responsible.

Tickets are limited so purchase as soon as possible to ensure a bus seat.

For additional information, contact the Chamber Agri-Business Committee at 419-422-3313.

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Lentz can be heard with Vann Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXA-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.