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Northampton County Open Gate Farm Tour features robotic milking system

Northampton farms open their gates for family-friendly learning experiences.

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Where else can you see how apples become applesauce and wheat makes flour?

It's a backyard, family-friendly experience that's being offered right here in the Lehigh Valley on the various farmlands of Northampton County.

The annual Northampton County Open Gate Farm Tour, appropriately themed "Apples into Applesauce, Wheat into Flour," will be held noon to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Visitors will be able to connect with local farmers and learn about the latest advances in agriculture. Some sites will be open only Sunday.

Farm tour activities include baling demonstrations and grain processing in addition to the use of high tunnels for vegetable and fruit production.

Easton's Keystone Farm, a family-run dairy farm headed by Doug Seipt, will feature a first in the county – a robotic milking system.

Seipt says it's been a year since he invested in the hi-tech system which originated in The Netherlands. In the life of a busy farmer, he says it's been a wonderful investment.

"There are 42 cows at present that are milked 24 hours a day by the system," Seipt explains. A collar worn by the cows holds a memory of their milking times.

"The cows are trained to enter the milking room at their own free will and be prewashed, sanitized and disinfected in the process. Any impurities in the milk can be read by the system," he says.

The milk is run through a filtering system and stored at 38 degrees in a cooling tank, he says. The milk is sold wholesale and is not available for retail at his farm, though.

"The system takes out human contact," Seipt says, "and allows me to be more flexible in my time doing crop work in the field."

As for the cows, they seem to have less stress in the milking room as Seipt provides a music hookup of soothing tunes by likes of The Carpenters, John Denver and Frank Sinatra.

Russell and Naydene Reeder, of Reeder's Farms in Forks Township, will showcase a new floral garden.

"We're not just sweet corn and pumpkins," says Naydene Reeder, who will be presenting a hands-on family-friendly project, "Raise a Teddy Bear Sunflower." Reeder says she originally created the "Raising Teddy" project as a fundraiser for the local 4-H.

The Northampton County 4-H Center in Nazareth will be featuring an Open Youth Schooling Horse Show on Sunday, says Janice Martin, 4-H program assistant.

Riders between the ages of 8 and 19 will participate in walk-trot, open, jumping and fun classes throughout the day. New this year will be a costume class at the end of the show, Martin says.

Activities also include a therapeutic driving demonstration by Equi-librium Inc., of Sciota, Pa.

Brochures and maps for the Northampton County Open Gate Farm Tour will be available at most farm sites, libraries and certain farm stores and are online at northampton.extension.psu.edu.

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