

## News Release

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### **Conservation District Hosts Successful Agriculture Tour**

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the Elk County Conservation District held a successful Agriculture Bus Tour. Twenty six attendees toured Hoffman Appalachian Farm, Straub Brewery, and Chocolate Drop Farm all located in St. Marys, PA.

At Hoffman Appalachian Farm, owner Joshua Brock gave a tour of his hop farm and explained the hop growing process. While there are many different varieties of hops, Joshua focuses primarily on the Cascade and Nugget varieties because they are conducive to our climate, soils, geographic region, and they can be used to brew many different types of beer. He harvests the crops in late August, doing most of the work by hand. Optimal time to harvest is based on the moisture content of the hops. The hops are then dried in an oast and eventually shipped to Straub Brewery. Joshua explained that he doesn't experience much pressure from deer and rabbit browsing, but Japanese Beetles have hit his plants hard this year. Because this operation raises their crops to a Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) standard, much of their pest problem is taken care of by hand. CNG means that they do not use synthetic chemicals or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Hoffman Appalachian Farm is dedicated to remaining a family-owned, community based operation that is focused on sustainable farming.

The tour continued to Straub Brewery where George Hasselman gave a very informative overview of the facility's history and brewing process. Founded by Peter Straub in 1872, Straub Brewery is one of the oldest family-owned breweries in the nation. They brew a variety of mostly ales and lagers, which take a great deal of timed planning, especially because much of the process is still done by hand. Skilled brew masters mix high-quality water with corn flakes and crushed malted barley to form a syrup called wort. They add hops, adjust the temperature, and ferment the mixture for seven days to produce beer. From there attendees were able to see where the beer is cold-stored before it gets shipped out. Tour group attendees even enjoyed a few samples from the Eternal Tap.

The tour wrapped up at Chocolate Drop Farm, owned by John and Sylvia Straub. They feed the spent grain from Straub's brewing process to their 17 Hereford beef cattle. Spent grain is nutrient-rich and contains high amounts of fiber and protein, great for the animals' diets. John and Sylvia are dedicated to keeping their farm clean so that they can reap the benefits of their hard work.

It was fascinating to see the process from beginning to end. From the growing of the crops, to production, to use of the spent grains, each phase was uniquely interesting. The Elk County Conservation District would like to thank all the attendees, tour hosts, and everyone who made this tour possible.



*Hops at Hoffman Appalachian Farm.*



*Hereford beef cattle eating spent grains.*