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PA MUSHROOM FARMERS, HISTORY AND INNOVATION SHOWCASED AT 103RD PA FARM SHOW

Avondale, PA, January 4, 2019 – Southeast Pennsylvania is known as the ‘Mushroom Capital of the World,’” where the largest concentration of mushrooms farms in the country operate. These 53 farms produce nearly two-thirds of all the common button mushrooms grown in the United States, and last year produced more than 570 million pounds of mushrooms with a farm gate value of $575 million, according to the Mushroom Farmers of Pennsylvania (MFPA).

That’s just one of the stories PA’s mushroom industry will highlight during the 103rd PA Farm Show in Harrisburg where hundreds of thousands of people from around the state will come to honor, sample and learn about PA’s agriculture’s rich heritage. This year’s show theme is ‘Inspiring Pennsylvania’s Story,’ and gives the mushroom industry the opportunity to introduce and connect with visitors about who they are, what they do and the impact they have in the state. Visitors will be able to meet PA mushroom farmers, learn about the process of growing mushrooms and more in the popular mushroom booth located in the Main Hall.

So who are mushroom farmers?

They are family. In 1919, Arthur P. Yeatman bought a farm in West Grove, PA to be used for dairy operations. It wasn’t until 1921 that he built his first two mushroom houses, followed by three more in 1922 and 1923. By 1930, the dairy operation was discontinued, and four more mushroom houses were built. Operating as A.P. Yeatman & Sons, Arthur’s son Clarence bought another 77-acre farm in 1949 with an additional 3.5 mushroom houses. Clarence’s oldest son Artie began the dairy operation again in 1950, and Clarence’s other two sons, Jim and Bob, came into the business in 1958. They formed a new partnership, C.P. Yeatman & Sons, where Clarence and Jim operated the mushroom farm while Artie and Bob operated the dairy farm. That lasted until 1962 when the dairy farm was sold. Today, in its fifth generation, C.P. Yeatman & Sons specializes in organic mushroom production and operates growing and packing divisions. This year, the farm will celebrate its centennial anniversary.

They are innovators. In 1927, William Phillips started Phillips Mushrooms Farms, a small mushroom growing business in Kennett Square, PA. His early experiments in using ice for temperature control during summer months were a significant breakthrough for the mushroom industry, allowing mushrooms to be grown year-round. In 1961, William’s sons, Donald and Marshall, formed a partnership and expanded the family growing operation into the packaging, marketing and transportation of white button mushrooms throughout the New England area. This operation expanded over the years until it was marketing 12 million pounds of white button mushrooms per year. In 1980, Don and Marshall felt a need to diversify their business and began experimenting with Shiitake mushrooms that were grown indoors on supplemental sawdust logs. Their dedication to this project enabled them to become the first successful indoor Shiitake growers in the U.S. Today, through state of the art technology, commitment to marketing and a personal approach to their business, Phillips Mushrooms Farms is the largest marketer of specialty mushrooms in the U.S.; distributing over 35 million pounds of mushrooms annually.
They are environmental stewards. Brothers Tom and Harold Brosius are the fifth generation at the helm of Marlboro Mushrooms in West Grove, PA, the oldest family mushroom farm in the country. While the mushroom farm has a rich history, Tom and Harold are looking to the future. In 2011 they installed nearly 5,000 solar panels at the farm, the largest tracking solar panel array in Pennsylvania. Mushrooms don’t typically need much help from the sun, however the controlled environment required to grow mushrooms requires tremendous amounts of energy and electricity. The panels enable the farm to harvest the sun’s power and take advantage of a renewable resource while limiting dependence on fossil fuels. With the panels, the brothers generate nearly 100% of their annual electric needs. Marlboro Mushrooms is the only solar powered mushroom farm in the world.

They are successful businesses. Pietro Giorgi built his first mushroom house in Temple, PA in 1928. While its commitment to excellence has continued throughout the decades, under Pietro’s leadership, Giorgi Mushrooms was able to adapt to changes in the industry. In the 1950’s, the company added a cannery to meet the demands of the supermarket industry and in the 1970’s Giorgi opened a modern facility to produce frozen mushrooms. Today, the company employs a management philosophy called Kaizen, which stresses the value of seeking ‘continuous improvement’ in everything the company undertakes – from growing and processing to service and delivery. In addition to internal growth, Giorgi has become one of the largest mushroom growers in the country.

“Pennsylvania’s mushroom industry supports 8,600 jobs throughout the state,” said Meghan Klotzbach, MFPA Chair. “These family-run, multi-generational mushroom farms contribute more than $1 billion to the local economy including sales, farm employment, taxes, and value of service industries that support the farms.”

Mushroom Farmers of Pennsylvania (MFPA), headquartered in Avondale, PA, is a state-wide, voluntary group representing the growers, processors and marketers of cultivated mushrooms in the state of Pennsylvania. For more information, visit www.pamushrooms.org.