

Upper Deerfield Township Environmental Commission

Farming: Our Heritage



Farmland is the most important resource of Upper Deerfield Township and has always been its major source of income. When the township was established a century ago, farms were typically a family affair. A single farm might grow many different kinds of vegetables, and usually had a small herd of cows that provided dependable income, especially in the winter when there were no crops. This practice ended when pasteurization became an expensive requirement. The farm wife often kept chickens and eggs for home use and for trading at the market when cash was scarce. In 1922, farmers still plowed and

cultivated with the help of a horse—the same horse that took the family to church on Sunday. Migrant workers came from their homes in Philadelphia and other urban areas to spend the summer in Upper Deerfield, working long hours in the fields.

How large were most of these farms? Until after WWII, 50 or 60 acres was enough to provide an adequate living for a farming family. The invention of the gasoline engine revolutionized life on the farm, making it possible to grow larger quantities of a single product and process and ship the surplus to other markets.

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Upper Deerfield Township 100th Anniversary Celebration
Saturday, April 23, Noon to 9 pm
Fun for the entire family!

-Entertainment -Arts & Crafts - Vendors

**Hoh Daiko Drummers, Seabrook Minyo Dancers,
 bands, jugglers, music and BMX show**

Tours, pony rides, tractor rides, trackless train, food court

****Fireworks at 8:30 pm****



Ornamental Shrubbery The growing of ornamental shrubbery on a commercial basis—today a thriving business—was introduced into Upper Deerfield by nurserymen who moved here from Holland in the early part of the 20th century. Koster Nursery was the first, established in 1917 on Route 77. Another early one, Deerfield Nurseries, was founded in the 1920's by Neal Overdevest, uncle of Ed Overdevest, Upper Deerfield's longtime Planning Board member and chairperson. Neal, who was joined in the business by his wife, Dorothy, established home, office and greenhouses on Route 77, just north of Rte. 540, with production facilities a few properties north. As part of his marketing efforts, he exhibited at the Philadelphia Flower Show, and hybridized a collection of azaleas known as the "Deerfield Azaleas." He also experimented with growing plants in containers long before that became a standard practice in the nursery industry.



Seabrook Farms Founded in 1917, Seabrook Farms by 1922 had grown from its original 60 acres to 20,000 acres of land plus an additional 35,000 scattered throughout South Jersey. They also farmed 1500 acres of peach and apple orchard, which were a major tourist attraction when they were blooming. When harvested, the fruit filled 20 freight train cars a day, which were shipped to markets all over the East coast. Before going out of business in 1959, Seabrook Farms had revolutionized farming with the "farm-as-factory," based on extensive research and experience regarding all aspects of growing, harvesting, processing and packaging foods. At its peak, the company employed 5,000 workers from 25 countries and processed nearly two million packages a day at their 23-acre plant. Seabrook Brothers & Sons, a much smaller operation founded in 1978, continues to process, freeze and repack vegetables, under their own label and for customers in the industrial ingredients, foodservice, and private-label retail sectors.

A Century Later Of Upper Deerfield's 31.8 square miles, more than 60% of the land today is dedicated to agriculture. With the high cost of equipment and labor, small farms are no longer financially viable. Efficient use of the land often means three crops a year, all planted and harvested mechanically. Some long-time family farms have been permanently preserved for non-commercial use, including the Munyon property, which is adjacent to the township's recreational facilities. Of the township's 20,352 acres, 3511 acres (17.3%) has so far been permanently preserved as "open space."



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A CENTENNIAL GIFT FOR YOU!

Visit us at our booth and receive one of our popular zip-up insulated reusable shopping bags.