



Friends Of Ag Annual Report 2023-2024

Our Mission

Planting **seeds**.

Cultivating **knowledge**.

Harvesting an understanding of **agriculture**.



Despite the gray, misty day that greeted us as we approached Deb Smith's front door, we could feel the warmth and joy emanating from the home before we even knocked. Deb and Denise's laughter spun in the air, and we already knew it would be quite the afternoon.

Debbie Smith and Denise Brenner, along with Dianne Herb in North Carolina, are the daughters of Chester and Sadie Heim. After Sadie Heim's recent passing, we reached out to Debbie to discuss the future of her father's named scholarship for those studying agriculture at Penn State or Delaware Valley University. It was clear right away that Chester and Sadie's high esteem for education was passed along to their daughters. Generously, and without hesitation, the Heim daughters decided to continue funding the scholarship and easing the burden on farm kids who want to receive higher education.



As we laughed, chatted, and sipped on Debbie's homemade tomato soup, it became evident that both sisters held their parents in the highest regard, and wanted to keep their values alive.

"For me, it would be their marriage," Debbie said, speaking about what she thought was the best thing about Chester and Sadie. "In a time where it was NOT the way things were – they were partners. In the farm, in raising the kids. They were both involved. Mother did housework, and she did the cooking, so from that standpoint it was very traditional, but in terms of the major decisions of life, they were equal."

"And she controlled the checkbook!" added Denise. "Very unusual for that time."

"They were very different that way, in that they talked things over," Debbie continued. "One didn't make a decision without making sure the other agreed with it. They would talk it over. And even the move, from the farm to suburbia in Mechanicsburg, was huge for them."

The Heims had raised their girls on a large farm owned by Chester and his two brothers, Lamar and Dean, in Pitman, Schuylkill County. "They called the farm Cha La Dee. It was spelled out C-H, L-A, D-E, for each of the brothers," Denise explained. As Debbie and Denise continued, it was obvious that Chester was part of the Farm Bureau family long before he was on their payroll. But in 1964, the family made the tough decision to move from Pitman to Mechanicsburg so that Chester could work for Farm Bureau (then called PFA) full time.

"It was really a family," Debbie said of Farm Bureau. "When we moved, especially. Those were our first friends, because they were our parents' friends and coworkers. That was really our social network, the PFA. We knew everybody, and they knew us. We were very involved, for being children."

"Oh yeah," Denise agreed. "We went everywhere with him!" The sisters reflected on their travels up, down, and across the state with their mother and father. They remembered how well Chester spoke at events and that they were always going along with him, wherever he needed to travel next.

"We met so many farmers!" Denise smiled. "I was a nurse at Hershey, and there was a man in the ICU, and he was one of the members up in the very north of the state. He was very sick and they brought him down to Hershey Med. And I took care of him. And he remembered, after he was discharged, that one night he was very critical and the doctor and I were both by his bedside all night. And he was so thankful. It was such a wonderful thing to help someone you know. There was another woman I knew from a fruit farm in Adams County, who had a brain tumor, and I got to take care of her, too."

"There were so many connections we made that way," she went on. "And our neighbors would remark to my parents that they never saw children our age that were willing to go everywhere with their parents – because they just didn't want to. Even some of my cousins, they didn't want to be with their parents like that. But if he had a meeting up in the northern part of the state, we would all be up there with him."

By this time, it was more than apparent that the girls placed immense value on their upbringing and wanted to follow in the steps of their parents, making it no surprise that they would continue the scholarship program. But we wondered what drew their family to support education in the first place. As it turns out, the story goes all the way back to their grandfather. Since he left high school to support his family, he always felt how important it was for kids to receive that education. "Eventually," Debbie said, "he, a non-graduate of high school, was on the board of trustees of our school district. His value of education was that high."

When Chester came along, he was able to finish his schooling, but always regretted not going to college. Since he was exempt from the Army to stay home and work on the farm, he went straight into farming and never got a degree. "He just felt that education, especially for farm kids, was extremely important," Denise said.

"My dad often wrote letters of recommendation for farm kids he knew to get scholarships," Debbie added. This would have been before he had a scholarship fund in his own name.

Chester and Sadie chose Penn State and Delaware Valley University for their scholarship funds because they knew the schools had excellent agriculture programs. The named scholarship came into play when Chester was nearing the end of his life. Denise emotionally recounted how several of those same friends from Farm Bureau were at his bedside to tell him about the scholarship. Sadie wanted to make sure he knew about the scholarship before it was too late. She wanted him to be a partner in it, just like they had done all their lives together.

"Both of our parents really believed in education for agriculture," Denise beamed. "You can't run a farm today and not have some kind of knowledge like that."

Even after Chester's passing, Sadie continued to clip every news article she came across that mentioned the FFA. She and Chester both thought education was the most valuable asset you could have. This year, two different students from the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences are receiving Heim Scholarship awards. One of those students, Emily Lynch, told us how supported she feels to know that someone who never met her still cares about her future.

"This scholarship makes my life easier by allowing me to not have to work as many hours to pay for college and my living expenses," Emily said. "In return, I can focus more on studies and participating in clubs and events, which allows me to get more farm experience."

Emily plans to start her own goat farm and remarked how this financial assistance will help her focus on that endeavor straight away, instead of trying to pay off loans after graduation. Right now, she's involved in the Block and Bridle Club, the Small and Exotic Animal Club, and the Center for Reproductive Biology and Health Research Team. She loves grooming mares and learning about the Farm Facilities through these activities. She reiterated how without the scholarship money, she would have to work more hours and wouldn't be able to spend as much time with her clubs, and therefore, she would have less experience as she moves into the workforce.

We asked Emily if there was anything she would like to say to Chester if he were still with us.

"I would like to thank Mr. Heim for believing in me. I would tell him how much his financial support means to me and how it helps me focus on my grades and allows me to enjoy my college experience. I would also thank Mr. Heim for the work he did for the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, which has helped connect farming communities across the state and helps farmers be better recognized in their communities," Emily answered.

This is the wonderful impact that the Heims have had on our future generations. Thanks to their dedication to education, a few special students each year can get their degrees without the burden of financial stress. It is truly only through our community that we can ensure all students, from kindergarten to college graduation, have a proper agricultural education and receive the opportunity to pursue a career in the field.



Board of Directors, 2023-2024

This year, we welcomed new members:
Raechel Sattazahn, Ray McMinn, and Charlie Porter.

Chair: Chris Hoffman
Vice Chair: Tommy Nagle
Brian Kelly
Crystal Skotedis
Gretchen Winklosky

Get in touch!

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By The Numbers

47,000

students reached during
Ag Literacy Week

160

schools visited
by an Ag Lab

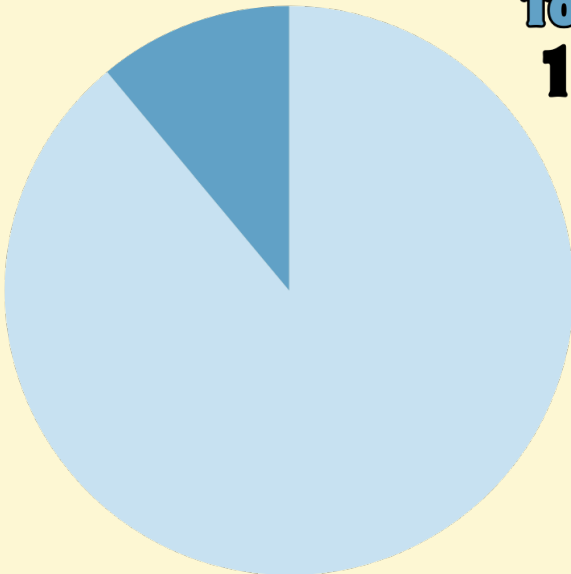
80

days in the
community with
the Immersion Lab



Foundation Financials

Administration
11.1%

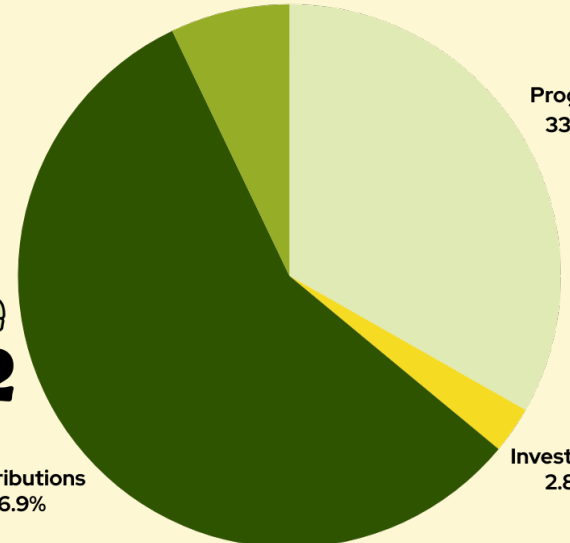


Program
88.9%

Total Expenses
1,115,423

Total Income
1,129,602

Other
7.1%



Contributions
56.9%

Program
33.2%

Investment
2.8%