



# THE MARKET BULLETIN

Gus R. Douglass, Commissioner

Janet L. Fisher, Deputy Commissioner

Steve Hannah, Deputy Commissioner

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## ANIMAL DISEASE in the forefront

It's the time of year again when avian influenza (AI) rears its ugly head after incubating these moist winter months. With the warm weather, it will become extremely active. The fact that we have a large population of migrating birds isn't helping either. AI has been reported in Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Texas.

At presstime, approximately 100,000 birds have been depopulated in Delaware. Ag officials there believe the situation is finally under control. There is also a report of a high pathogen AI outbreak in Texas. This is the first reported case of high pathogen AI in the United States in 20 years. So far, a flock of 7,000 has been depopulated. Pennsylvania had a scare, but this turned out to be low pathogen. I urge the poultry industry to continue practicing accepted biosecurity measures on your farms, use caution in public meetings, discourage wild birds from around poultry houses, and most importantly, monitor any changes in your flocks. If you notice any symptoms, particularly respiratory symptoms, alert your field worker with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture's (WVDA) Animal Health Division, or your field representative if you are an integrator.

Let me stress to consumers that our problems here are not related to the bird flu outbreaks in Asia, which have proven fatal to some humans. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken all possible precautions to prevent its introduction here.

I noted in last month's column that much of the WVDA's time is devoted to activities aimed at preventing the introduction of foreign animal diseases, viruses and bacteria, as well as disease threats upon our forests and plants in West Virginia. This past month I

again traveled to Washington, D.C., to chair a meeting of the USDA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Foreign Animal and Poultry Diseases. The Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman, reappointed the entire committee due to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) emergency. A fact-finding international committee, commissioned by our committee, reported to us their findings on BSE in the United States. Our report has been finalized and has been made public.

About two years ago, the USDA commissioned Harvard University to prepare a risk assessment on BSE in the United States. The study projected a very low possibility of BSE, and differs considerably from the international committee's evaluation. Over-regulation of non-contagious disease, such as BSE, causes me concern. The banning of animal parts in livestock feed may have merit, as does the banning of the brain, spinal column and parts of the intestine from the food chain. Since all downer or non-ambulatory animals are considered adulterated, this takes them out of the food chain for the purposes of testing. A new approach must be developed to remove these animals from farms and feedlots, possibly to renderers, where they may still be tested.

Three animals have been tested for BSE here in West Virginia, with no positives, but one did test positive for rabies. It pays to be cautious because the symptoms of BSE, rabies and some other diseases are very similar, making it difficult for the layman and veterinarians to diagnose.

Livestock identification is extremely critical to the control and tracing of any animal disease. The goal is to have all livestock farms identified and an identification number assigned to them by 2004. Individual identifica-



### Gus' View . . .

tion of the farms will be a few months down the road, as we try to identify all livestock farms in the state. I do not recommend any livestock owner buy any type of identification system until the USDA designates the radio frequency on which the program will be based. We must have a system that is compatible nationwide.

No doubt foreign trading in meat and poultry is going to be volatile, especially as we look to regaining our international markets. Japan is basically the key trade partner, and if they resume importation of U.S. meats, I believe the rest of the world will follow suit. My comment is that due to the early actions of USDA in 1997, there is a very low risk of BSE in the U.S. We have one advantage, however. The latest USDA cattle report I reviewed shows the national 2003 cattle herd is the smallest in eight years, and our calf crop is the smallest in 50 years. This has to favor livestock farmers here in the U.S. since prices have stabilized after the BSE scare.

What is happening with the Legislature as it pertains to agriculture? There is legislation providing the Department of Agriculture authority to regulate exotic animals and pet shops.

The ATV legislation continues to get a lot of attention, most of which pivots around private landowner use.

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# Gus' View...

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Operators of deer farms again have legislation addressing captive deer defining them as domestic animals and coming under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture. There is also legislation providing for commercial slaughter of whitetail deer and retail sales of venison.

Water legislation is getting a lot of attention, especially as it relates to reporting the use of all state waters. This legislation will require a survey of surface water and groundwater in the state, enabling the state to determine who the major water users in West Virginia are.

The bottled water market continues to grow nationally. The latest statistic I've seen is that bottled water is almost equal to milk in per capital consumption. The average American consumed 21.2 gallons of bottled water compared to 21.9 gallons of milk.

The USDA has released some preliminary statistics from the most recent agricultural census. My attention was drawn to the fact that West Virginia ranks number one in the nation in family farm operations. I am pleased that our 20,000 small farms have been recognized for their contributions to West Virginia's economy. The commercial numbers have increased by an additional 33 farms over the past five years with sales over one-half million dollars of products. I believe we can capitalize upon this factor as we look to farmland protection programs, tourism, and agribusiness development.

Two other statistics from the census caught my eye. The average age of American agricultural producers in 2002 was 55.3 years of age, and 27.2 percent were women. The number of women who were principle operators increased 12.6 percent from 1997. The West Virginia average farm operator's age is 56.

I have increased my efforts to secure recognition from the West Virginia Legislature on the importance of agriculture and agribusiness to this state. Currently, there are insufficient funds allocated to agribusiness development or promotion of the agricultural economy. I am requesting that the Legislature allocate \$1 million of lottery funds to agricultural events for their promotion and perpetuation.

My mail tells me tobacco farmers are using their pens to write to their legislators and protest that they are not receiving development monies that should have been allocated for those who have lost income from tobacco. In the past, we have asked the Legislature to share the tobacco settlement money on a matching basis

with tobacco farmers as is being done in surrounding states. There is legislation this year allocating \$5 million for distribution to approximately 2,500 present and former tobacco growers in this state. This money would be made available on a matching basis which equates to getting an immediate \$10 million investment in this state in breeding livestock, greenhouses, irrigation, fencing, aquaculture and other agriculture programs.


I want to point out the guidelines for sheep exhibitors that are being circulated by West Virginia University Extension. The newest guidelines I have state, "Lambs born after January 1, 2002, will be accepted for exhibition only if tails are not docked shorter than the level of the distal end of the caudal tail fold. Lambs that are properly docked will have a minimum tail length of .7 inches at show, measured by the approved measurement device, which will be placed against the base of the tail and pin-bones."

These guidelines should help exhibitors overcome considerable problems that have ex-

isted here in the past. Hopefully, a national policy will soon be adopted that addresses these issues and ensures the future of these important youth livestock programs. For more information or for a copy of the policy, you may contact your local extension agent.

On a sad note, I've just been informed that ShenValley Creamery in Timberville, Va., is being auctioned at the end of February. Reportedly, there are just not enough farm folks to supply them with product. I remember when this was a major source of income to many small dairy farms. My father-in-law depended on that income from his five or six dairy animals. It is sad to see them go.

It's a busy time here on the farm as the cows are starting to calve a week or two early, but all is going well. Our new concern is the coyotes that seem to have congregated on the farm.

We're looking forward to spring and gardening again. In fact, within the next few days, I plan to plant some onion sets. As Anna Lee chides, I just can't wait any longer. 

## Genetic Testing Offered to Fight Sheep Disease

West Virginia sheep producers are encouraged to have their rams tested for a genetic susceptibility to a transmissible *spongiform encephalopathy* (TSE) illness called scrapie. The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) is offering the service free of charge as part of a national program aimed at eradicating scrapie.

"A simple blood test can determine if a ram is able to pass genetic resistance against scrapie," said State Veterinarian Joe Starcher. "Rams that have been tested and are known to carry resistant genes, make ideal breeding stock."

"Scrapie has plagued the farmers of this state for a long time," said Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass. "I hope our producers will take advantage of this program, which can go a long way toward eradicating this disease."

To participate in the program, producers must contact the WVDA's Division of Animal Health Moorefield Office at (304) 538-2397 or Charleston Office at (304) 558-2214 or their local veterinarian. Local veterinarians and the WVDA will work together to implement this innovative program.

Scrapie is a fatal, degenerative disease

affecting the central nervous system of sheep and goats. First documented in Great Britain and other countries of Western Europe more than 250 years ago, scrapie has been reported throughout the world. Only two coun-

tries are recognized by the United States as being free of scrapie: Australia and New Zealand. Scrapie has been diagnosed in more than 1,000 flocks in this

country.

Scrapie – so named because one symptom of the disease involves rubbing against fence posts and the like – is classified as a transmissible *spongiform encephalopathy* (TSE), the same kind of malady that causes mad cow disease in cattle, chronic waste disease in deer and elk, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans.

Epidemiologic evidence does not support that scrapie in sheep and goats may be transmitted to humans through contact on the farm, at slaughter plants, butcher shops, or through the consumption of sheep or goat meat/milk products.

The primary method of transmission is by contact and oral ingestion of placental or fetal fluids. Thus, proper disposal of any fetal tissues from suspected animals should be handled with the utmost biosecurity measures.

**The long-term goal of the program is the nationwide eradication of scrapie, which annually causes significant loss of production in infected flocks.**

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# *Animal ID System Still in Planning Stages*

West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass has advised livestock producers in the state to be patient before purchasing any new animal identification equipment.

"Although the need for a uniform national animal identification system is more apparent than ever, the actual form that the system will take is still in the planning stages," said Commissioner

Douglass.

"Regardless of what people may have heard, no decisions have been made on the technology to be used. Livestock producers would, therefore, be well advised to hold off on the purchase of any equipment until USDA makes a final decision on how to proceed," he added.

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) met through the weekend in Washington, D.C., for the group's mid-year meeting with animal identification being high on the agenda. Commissioner Douglass chairs NASDA's Animal and Plant Industries Committee, which will be instrumental in formulating proposals for future regulations.

"What we're looking for is a uniform system that allows for a traceback anywhere in the country within 48 hours," said State Veterinarian Joe Starcher. Tracebacks allow animal health professionals to see all the places a diseased animal has been and all the other animals it may have contacted.

"Speed is really of the essence when you're talking about foreign animal diseases," said Dr. Starcher. "Animal diseases spread exponentially. The faster they can be detected and quarantined, the more success will be achieved in eradicating the disease."

Dr. Starcher said that a number of companies are developing radio frequency-based identification systems that allow animals to be "scanned" as they pass an electronic chip reader. Data from the chips – which may be inserted under the skin or included on an ear tag – can then be stored on a computer database. The problem at this point is that the competing systems are not necessarily compatible with each other.

Dr. Starcher added that USDA plans to have 12-digit facility identification numbers ready to roll out by July, and is aiming for July 2005 to have identification on (or in) cattle, sheep and goats.

Dr. Starcher attended the West Virginia Cattleman's Association Annual Meeting in mid-February and found that producers were behind the program, despite concerns about the potential cost to the industry. "There was no opposition from the industry because the benefit of the program is fully understood," said Dr. Starcher.

## **MARCH 15 DEADLINE**

### **Quickly Approaching for Crop Insurance Premium Assistance Program**

The United States Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency (USDA-RMA) is offering farmers interested in buying crop insurance money to help make premium payments.

The program, recently authorized by Congress, allows for the payment of up to 15 percent of the producers' net premiums, depending on the level of coverage, but the March 15 deadline is quickly approaching.

"I encourage all producers to keep the deadline in mind and to take advantage of this program," said Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass. "Crop insurance is an important tool in managing on-the-farm risk, and, unlike the weather, it is one factor within the farmers' control."

Crop insurance provides protection against losses in crop production due to natural perils, including drought, hail, frost, excessive moisture and other adverse weather conditions in most crop protection plans.

For more information or to apply for the program, contact your local Farm Service Agency Office.

# State Agencies Come Together to Form *RESOURCE ROUNDTABLE*

**A** Resource Roundtable has been established by several state agencies. Through a Memorandum of Understanding the W.Va. Cooperative Extension Service, WVU Associate Provost for Extension and Public Service, W.Va. Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station - WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences, W.Va. Division of Forestry (DOF), W.Va. Division of Natural Resources (DNR), W.Va. Department of Agriculture (WVDA) and W.Va. Conservation Agency (WVCA) will come together to pool resources and funding in order to make a more dramatic effort in dealing with natural resource issues and natural disasters that impact the Mountain State.

"The Resource Roundtable will pool the abilities of several distinct government



**Commissioner Douglass signs the Memorandum of Understanding at the February 25 ceremony.**

Douglass. "I commend all the agencies involved for their cooperation and the vision they have exhibited in getting this initiative off the ground."

"The Wildlife Resources and State Parks sections of DNR produce nearly a billion dollars in economic impact for our state each year, and there's room to increase that amount," said DNR Director Ed Hamrick. "By combining the resources of our agencies, we will be able to improve the rate of growth with minimal additional investment from the people who enjoy and benefit from our natural resources

based recreational opportunities."

"The Resource Roundtable only makes sense," said Randy Dye, WVDOF State Forester. "The need for this type of

organization is long overdue and its foundation is very timely in light of the State's difficult economic situation. The forest products industry has an annual economic impact of \$3.2 billion; by utilizing the combined resources, this amount could be substantially increased without additional cost."

"The Resource Roundtable represents our commitment to working together to wisely use the state's limited resources and coordinate, not duplicate, programs and efforts," added Lawrence Cote, Director, West Virginia Cooperative Extension Service & WVU Associate Provost for Extension & Public Service.

"Agriculture, forestry and natural resources are very important to West Virginia for they contribute to economic development and quality of life, yet the task of preserving and enhancing these resources is too large for any one agency," said Cameron Hackney, Dean of WVU's Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences. "By working together we maximize the benefit to all the people of West Virginia."

"We all agree that by working together we can have more of an impact in dealing with ecological issues across our state," said Truman Wolfe, WVCA Executive Director. "The time has come for a merging like this and everyone involved is excited to be a part of such a monumental achievement for our government and, more importantly, our people."

The signing took place February 25, in the Governor's Conference Room at the State Capitol.

For more information, contact Kevin Pauley, WVCA Communications Specialist, at 304/558-2204; by cell phone at 304/550-3797; or at [kpauley@wvca.us](mailto:kpauley@wvca.us).



**L-R: Lawrence Cote, Director, W.Va. Cooperative Extension Service & WVU Associate Provost for Extension & Public Service; Gus R. Douglass, Commissioner of Agriculture; Ed Hamric, Director, Division of Natural Resources; Randy Dye, Director and State Forester, W.Va. Division of Forestry; Cameron Hackney, Dean, WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences and; Truman Wolfe, Executive Director, W.Va. Conservation Agency with the newly signed Memorandum of Understanding.**

agencies, helping to deal with our state's budget crisis while maintaining services at the highest level possible," said Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R.

# Family Farms

## Overwhelming Majority in West Virginia, says Census

The West Virginia Agriculture Statistics Service (WVASS) recently revealed a sneak peak of its full 2002 Census of Agriculture, due out in June. Among the highlights: West Virginia is the number one state in the country in percentage of family farms, followed by Tennessee, Alabama, Oklahoma and South Carolina. Individuals or families run 95.3 percent of the Mountain State's farms.

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**“The family farm is alive and well in West Virginia,”** said Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass. **“The communities of this state continue to foster a rural lifestyle that residents of other states would love to have – and agriculture is a large part of that appeal. This preliminary census data shows that farming continues to be a stable and productive element of our economy.”**

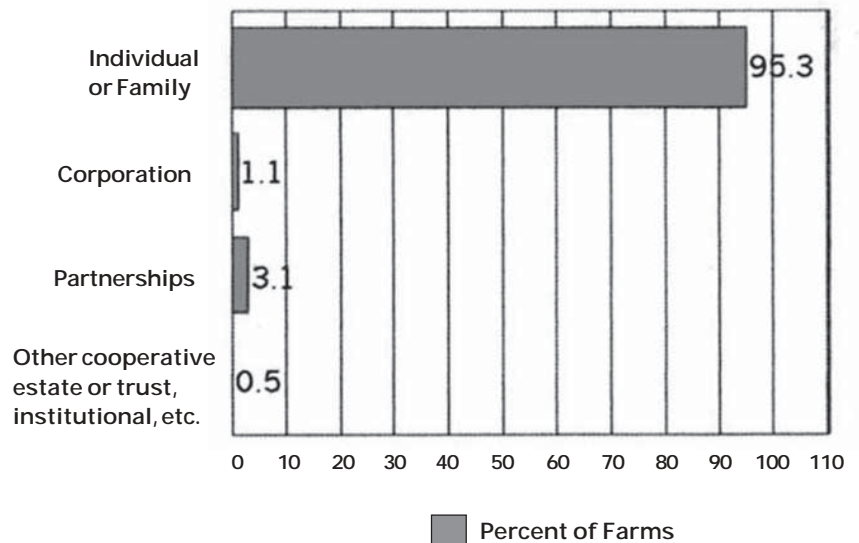
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The census data also revealed that operations that sold more than a half-million dollars worth of products grew by 33 farms – up from 195 to 228 in the past five years. The average age of a West Virginia farmer remained steady at just over 56 years – approximately three years older than the nation's average farmer.

This census has also gathered data on women in agriculture in the first-ever effort to comprehensively measure the number of women involved in day-to-day farming. In West Virginia, those women make up a quarter of all farm operators.

The full Census of Agriculture, due out June 3, will include a much broader picture of agriculture in West Virginia and the nation. Issued every five years, the full Census of Agriculture includes detailed information on the amounts and values of crops and livestock, as well as information on farm labor and productivity.

Type of Organization: 2002



## Tobacco Crop Insurance Deadlines Approaching

Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass reminds tobacco farmers in the Mountain State that they must purchase a crop insurance policy no later than March 15 in order to be eligible for the burley tobacco federal crop insurance program.

“Risk management is an aspect of farming that simply cannot be ignored,” said Commissioner Douglass. “We can’t control the weather or the market, but we can control how we prepare for the problems that can happen on our farms.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) oversees the program with help from state departments of agriculture. The program protects against adverse weather conditions, plant diseases and insects, drought, fire and damage from wildlife.

Burley tobacco farmers must have all their plants in the ground by June 30, and must file an acreage report with their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office by July 15. Premium share varies widely depending on the level of coverage chosen. For more information, call your local FSA office, or visit [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov).

# Can I Farm this Water Source?

*Julie Delabbio, Associate Professor of Aquaculture, Bluefield State College.*

*I recently received a letter from a reader asking how to evaluate the aquaculture potential of a water source. There are two things that have to be evaluated: the quantity of the water and the quality of the water. Once you have this information, and only when you have this information, can you make realistic decisions about aquaculture development.*

## **Water quantity:**

How much water and when does it occur are the first questions that need to be answered. If someone is considering an aquaculture venture, I generally recommend that they measure the volume and water flow of the primary water source (well, spring, creek, mine water discharge pipe) over a one-year period on a bi-weekly basis. It is important that you try to take this measurement at the point where the water will be entering your farm. I recommend taking water measurements every two weeks so that you can get a reasonable appreciation of when the high and low flows/volumes occur in your water source. Having this information is extremely important in aquaculture. It will determine your farming strategy. It would surprise many people to know how many large aquaculture operations have been built without this critical information (and have financially failed because of this). Having information for one or two points in the year is not sufficient information. Having information from nearby water sources is not good enough. With all the technology we have today, it is still almost impossible to create large quantities of water. And since fish live and depend on water . . . it is therefore crucial that a farmer know what quantity of water is available BEFORE starting to farm.

## **Water quality:**

Different species of fish have different water quality requirements. Fish also have different water quality requirements depending on their stage of development. Very young fish require better water quality than older, adult fish and have less tolerance for changes in water quality. So the quality of your water will determine what fish species and what stage (age) of fish you can grow. Again, all water quality measurements should be taken as close to the first point of use (incoming water) on your farm as possible.

The two most important measurements to take from the water source are water temperature and dissolved oxygen. In some parts of West Virginia acidic water is a problem so another good measurement to take is pH. There are other water quality measurements that may be important depending on your water source. Well water and deep mine discharge water should be measured for carbon dioxide levels. If there is a lot of disturbance or discharge upstream of your farm, you may want to measure suspended solids.

Finally, the "security" of your water source should be evaluated. Are there other users /nearby industries who may change the water quantity and quality of your water through their activities? For instance, herbicide/pesticide application on nearby fields can be catastrophic to an aquaculture water source. Similarly, lumbering or mining or activities associated with these industries, such as road construction, can drastically alter a water source.

For those people contemplating the use of a mine water source for aquaculture development, there is a one-day workshop entitled "Mine Water Aquaculture" being held in Morgantown on Thursday, April 22. Contact Patty Bruce at 304/344-8554 for more details.

For more information on water quality and quantity requirements there are a number of pamphlets available from the Aquaculture Extension Office at WVU. Contact WVU Aquaculture Extension, 1052 Agricultural Sciences Building, P.O. Box 6108, Morgantown, WV 26506-6108; office, 304/293-6131, ext. 4211; fax, 304/293-6954 or check out the website at: [www.wvu.edu/~agexten/aquaculture/](http://www.wvu.edu/~agexten/aquaculture/)

If you have an aquaculture-related question that you would like to see answered in this column, please send it to:

**219 Rock St., Bluefield State College  
Bluefield, WV 24701**

Bluefield State College offers a two-year degree program in Commercial Aquaculture.

# Harrison YWCA KICKS OFF Cottage Industries Program

With four chefs in her husband's family, you would think Susan Verona's entrance into the world of cottage industries would have been inspired by some fabulous holiday concoction whipped up by the in-laws.

However, Verona's invention was born of necessity. Her young daughter loves diced fruit, and Verona wanted to give her organic food. She found a variety of organic baby foods, but no fruit.

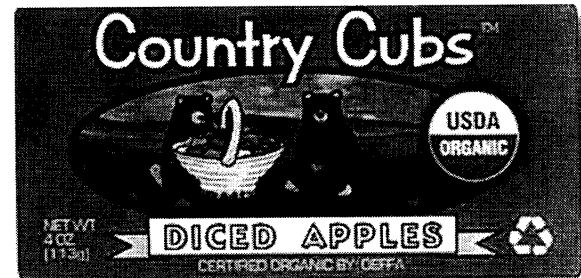
"I thought, 'I can't be the only one out there looking for organic diced fruit,'" said Verona.

She produced her first "Country Cubs" commercial batch February 7 at the Harrison County YWCA, and in the process became the first tenant in the Y's incubator kitchen. Members of Clarksburg City Council and Greater Clarksburg Associates (GCA) — a business and community organization — attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Commissioner Douglass praised the efforts and cooperation of all involved. "We have the ingredients in this state to develop from within, and the cottage industries program at the Harrison County YWCA is a perfect example. By using an existing facility, a new agribusiness can have a chance to develop a customer base before investing in a commercial facility of its own."

YWCA Executive Director Doris Kidd said she expects Verona to make a mark in the community.

"Susan is the first entrepreneur to take full advantage of the cottage industries program being offered here," said



Kidd. "Women helping women achieve entrepreneurial success is the best way to describe [it]." She invited others to take advantage of the commercial-grade facility.

GCA President Cathy Goings is impressed with Verona's tenacity in seeking out a facility with the equipment she needed to produce commercially.

"It's a unique opportunity to test-market a product," Goings said. "I highly encourage anyone to take advantage of the program. The kitchen is fully equipped, with ovens and everything you might need. I don't know how it can get any better than that."

Verona would like to eventually see her product filling a niche in local grocery stores and organic chains, but, for now, she's in the experimental stage. "I'm taking things one step at a time," she said.

Verona's products will soon be sold at Caitlin's Closet and Kaleidoscopes in Clarksburg.

For more information on the Program, contact YWCA Executive Director Doris Kidd, 304/624-6882.

