

Amish Businesses in a Modern World

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This tour visited the Belleville area in Central Pennsylvania. It is an area with at least three sects of Old Order Amish, a very conservative religious group that has lived in Pennsylvania since the eighteenth century. The Amish were established in the late 1600s in Switzerland as a reform movement within the Mennonite religious community; most significantly, they opposed the union of church and state and infant baptism. William Penn offered them sanctuary from religious persecution in his New World colony of Pennsylvania, and the first recorded Amish immigrants (the Detweiler and Sieber families) arrived in Berks County in 1736. Approximately 80% of today's Old Order Amish still live in Pennsylvania. They have attempted to preserve the rural culture of late seventeenth-century Europe, and remain primarily farmers and craftsmen. They are the only significant immigrant group in the United States to have retained a non-English language of the hearth since Colonial times.

The group visited two Amish farms and an Amish woodworking shop. In each case, the family is trying to earn a living in the very competitive economy, while maintaining its traditional lifestyles and values. This requires acceptance of some modern technology, while living in a very simple way. Tour members were reminded that the Old Order Amish do not like to be photographed, although visitors are permitted to take pictures of the setting and equipment. Lunch was available at a local Amish restaurant serving traditional "Pennsylvania Dutch" cuisine. In all three cases, our hosts were very informative as well as very interested in the unique background of the tour members.

Joseph Peachey, furniture maker, Allensville, PA: He and his son make fine furniture using traditional methods. Using a belt-driven system typical of the early industrial revolution, they run lathes, drills, and other machinery to make chairs, dressers, and fine cabinetry. One of his current jobs is a large cabinet being built to house the torah in a New York synagogue.

David Peachey, farmer, draft horses and dairy, Allensville, PA: Mr. Peachey has 17 dairy cattle and about 65 Belgium draft horses. He and his wife milk the cows by hand. All his machinery is pulled by horses, including a no-till planter. His main source of income is from the sale of horses.

David Swarey, farmer, orchard, Belleville, PA: He and his family have a small orchard and sell most of their apples at the farm gate. He showed us his equipment and the insect-monitoring system he uses in order to minimize his spraying as part of his integrated pest management plan. Many of the group also had a chance to speak with Swarey's wife and sons.

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