

The Rural Life Demonstration Center

Pro: Con:

The ideology behind the Rural Life Demonstration Center coincides with the basic premises of Mars Hill College itself. Throughout its history, Mars Hill has dedicated itself to providing the highest quality and the most relevant education possible for its students and has attempted to follow a commitment to the people and the land of Appalachia. The gift of this 1,000-acre farm to Mars Hill by Mrs. Mildred Bruce allows a means of better achieving both of these objectives.

The first of these, providing a high-quality and relevant education to its students, is well-enhanced by the formation of the Rural Life Demonstration Center. The farm can potentially be a very useful and valuable educational tool, one which can be implemented in many academic areas, among them all the natural sciences, physical education, personal development, cultural values, sociology, and history, just to name a few of the more obvious. With the added dimensions offered by the farm, the quality and scope of education received by many students would be appreciably increased.

The relevance of their education would likewise be increased. Learning such practical skills as farming, canning, maintaining a rural lifestyle, and co-existing with nature are talents which are increasingly becoming more and more needed in today's inflated economy.

The farm would also help the college fulfill its commitment to the people and land of the Appalachian region. Increasingly in this area, it is becoming more and more difficult for small local farmers to etch out an existence in competition with big agribusiness corporations. This is especially important in light of the impending bust in tobacco subsidies from the federal government. Mars Hill, however, doesn't feel that this means the small farms of our region are no longer economically viable; it just feels that there should be experimentation with new crops and an organization of local farmers to stave off the clutches of big business in order to further these goals. The Bruce Farm has already implemented programs in French intensive gardening and solar energy, and are hard at work coming up with others. Community workshops will be held at the farm to provide alternative methods for interested local farmers.

The programs of the Rural Life Demonstration Center are originated by a steering committee composed of about fifteen faculty, students, staff, and community members. The chairman of this committee is Dr. Richard Hoffman, and other committee members include a biologist, an historian, a local farmer, an education instructor, the president of the College, and a student. Working together, the steering committee hopes to come up with equal representation of policies and interests.

Perhaps the most important result of the Bruce Farm will be the instilling of values that will accompany participation and involvement with it. These values, traditionally associated with rural life, are hard work, an appreciation of nature, a concern for others, a sense of togetherness and belonging, a sense of accomplishment and pride, and the desire to help others. Many people have been deprived of these values, values which are important not only in a rural environment, but in every part of our culture. A Mars Hill program like the Rural Life Demonstration Center helps to spread these values and thus betters not only Mars Hill College or the Appalachian region, but the entire country.

Gus Jenkins



Let's Have a Health Olympics

Competition seems to be the Great American Pastime for the majority of American people. People compete for natural resources, for athletic honors, job positions. Sometimes competition seems to be the primary source of motivation for people. Children are pushed to compete throughout school — they are well trained for competition in higher education and careers. There always seems to be another rung on the ladder to "success."

After visiting a Health Awareness Center in Georgia recently and meeting Dr. William Saunders, an unusual M.D. who practices preventive medicine, I had a wild notion — what if people started competing in the area of health. What if everyone decided to work her way up the optimum health ladder. What would it be like to live in a community of wellness oriented people, a nation of well people, a place where people compete to achieve optimum health.

The list of fringe benefits would be endless. If people ate less, there would be more food to go around; people would demand quality food low on the food chain,

I don't know about you, but I've always been under the impression that Mars Hill was a liberal arts college, not an agricultural school. So why in the world the administration has decided to start a Rural Life Demonstration Center, I'll never know. I mean, I can't even get a course offered in Latin, yet I'll bet it would be as easy as pie to get one in growing rutabagas. Is this a change of policy for the college? It sure looks like one to me.

And where's the money coming from to fund this new experiment? I've got a suspicion that it comes from where the money to run everything else comes from — my and your pockets. Oh, I know the Bruce Farm was a gift to the college, and I've heard all about the endowments and government grants that are being used to pay for it. But those funds could surely be channeled into worthy spots on campus — like for instance, to improve the dorms, to buy some twentieth-century equipment for the cafeteria, to give pay raises to our hard-working faculty and staff, to lower tuition or at least keeping it from rising every year. Even if the farm is used as planned, there's still no chance of it helping the college in any measureable way the most that's hoped for is that it will keep itself self-perpetuating.

I think the motives behind the Rural Life Demonstration Center are questionable, also. It's intended, or so I gather, to help local farmers improve their crops and to provide alternate planting methods. Sound pretty condescending for a bunch of high-fallutin' doctors to try and tell life-time farmers the right way to raise a crop. It sounds even worse when I hear they're considering hiring a farmer from outside the region to come in and show the locals how to plant.

Another problem I see is the lack of ethics involved. The two main areas I see this in are the raising of tobacco and the use of bulldozers for land-scaping. In relation to the former, I would just like to say that I find it impossible to believe that a group of people as educated and intelligent as those who are in charge of the Bruce Farm are advocating the use of tobacco by growing it on the farm; especially when you consider how foolish it is to continue to grow a crop that the bottom is going to drop out of any day, not to mention the moral stand the college should take against tobacco. In relation to the latter, I guess it's just obvious that this isn't intended to be a Rural Life Preservation Center, changing the face of the land by such subtle means as gouging it out and pushing it to where its more functional, is sure to wreak environmental havoc. When will people learn that you can't push Mother Nature around, literally and figuratively, without severe ecological repercussions — repercussions which will not only manifest themselves immediately but for years and years to come, knocking over one after another of nature's dominoes.

It is for these reasons that I think the people directing the destiny of the Rural Life Demonstration Center should take a careful re-evaluation of the conditions that surround the farm. And in this second look, perhaps they'll notice that the Bruce Farm is draining precious resources from the college, the people in the community, and the land itself.

Darryl Gossett

LETTER

Dear Editor,

Mars Hill College advertises a Christian faculty and staff with a personal concern for their students. In my almost two years here, I have heard pros and cons as to the validity of this claim. Formerly, I had no basis for "choosing sides" in this debate. I was making the grades, and somewhat learning the material offered, on my own. I didn't need the faculty concern, time, and as-

stance I was hearing so much about, so to me it merely became an oft-quoted motto.

Recently, however, I have had occasion to discuss academic and other difficulties with several members of the faculty and administration, all of whom were very understanding and supportive. This letter is to thank them and to say that I side with the "pro" school.

Sincerely,
Betsy Criminger

therefore encouraging reverence toward the land and curbing the "food for profit not for people" syndrome of agribusiness and food technology. If people valued exercise, our need for so much oil to power automobiles would be reduced. If people began to understand the destructiveness of constant stress, there would be less irrational, volatile, violent behavior and stress-related disease. If people realized that they are cultivating disease-prone habits/lifestyles and put as much energy into healthy habits/lifestyles, what a fantastic distinction our nation would have. We could win a gold medal in a Health Olympics instead of settling for a nearly thirtieth place among countries as we are now.

Everyone has the power to win optimum health. It's not a dog eat dog competition like most of the competition people engage in. All it takes is the desire to enter the health competition and willingness to work at cultivating healthy habits. Everyone can be Number 1.

Like I said, it's a wild notion.

Jill Mannisto