

**Benoni D. Allnutt**  
**Montgomery County Farmer**

Benoni Dawson Allnutt, 90, a farmer in upper Montgomery County for six decades, died June 12 at the Nightingale House senior care facility in Gaithersburg. He had suffered a stroke in April.

Mr. Allnutt's was born on his family's Homestead Farm property near Poolesville. His father bought the 350 acres in the late 19th century from another branch of the family; it now has 230 acres.

Mr. Allnutt graduated from Poolesville High School in 1933 and briefly attended the University of Cincinnati before being called back to run the farm for his ailing father. At the time, Homestead Farm was a farm with cattle, wheat, hogs and corn.

Under his guidance, the farm, by the 1960s, began to supply vegetables for a cannery in Gaithersburg. When that business left the area, Mr. Allnutt began selling produce to the public from a truck he drove into Washington. As his farm's reputation grew, he conducted business solely from the produce stand on Homestead Farm.

He introduced an educational component to the business in the 1960s by allowing elementary school students to visit and learn about agriculture.

His oldest son and namesake, who took over the business in the early 1990s, had introduced pick-your-own strawberries and fruit trees to the farm.

Mr. Allnutt made his own sausage and apple sauce, and he was credited by local publications with having created a powerful homemade Bloody Mary mix.

His memberships included the Upper Montgomery County Farmers Club and Darnestown Presbyterian Church.

His wife of two years, Lucille Johnson Allnutt, died in 1949.

Survivors include his wife of 55 years, Sarah Thomas Allnutt of Gaithersburg; five children from his second marriage, Benoni "Ben" Allnutt Jr. of Poolesville, Tom Allnutt of Glenwood, Bob Allnutt of Gaithersburg and Anne Allnutt and Caroline Allnutt, both of Silver Spring; and eight grandchildren.

-- Adam Bernstein



The family will hold a memorial service for family and friends at Homestead Farm. In lieu of sending flowers, the family asks that donations be made to Autism Speaks [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org) in honor of Benoni, for the benefit his grandson Jack Allnutt and others like him.

Also, we have a web site set up on [www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org). Please do leave a message in the "Guestbook" section, as we are going to print out all of them and create a memory book. Here is the direct link: <http://www.caringbridge.org/cb/inputSiteName.do?method=search&siteName=benoniallnutt>

For anyone who missed the feature on June 15's NBC4 5 o'clock News -- here is a link to the clip: <http://video.nbc4.com/player/?id=120232>

## **A Local Life: Benoni Dawson Allnutt Traditional Farmer Found Ways To Transform With Changing Times**

By Adam Bernstein, Washington Post Staff Writer

During six decades cultivating his family's acreage near Poolsville, in upper Montgomery County, Benoni Allnutt tried to adapt to massive change.

His "Homestead Farm" stopped functioning as an all-purpose hog-corn-cattle-wheat business in the years after World War II. In time, horticulture took over entirely. The fall pumpkin crop and pick-your-own berries became essential additions for Allnutt's survival as a full-time farmer in a rapidly changing county. Yet they also created what some family members have jokingly called "agritainment" and a farm that appears "more Disneyland than heartland."

Allnutt, who died June 12 at 90 after a stroke, began bringing elementary schoolchildren to the farm in the 1960s to educate them about farm life. He liked to take them marching through a barn with its cow droppings liberally carpeting the hay. He enjoyed squirting the children with warm milk from a cow's udder, a vivid reminder that milk does not come from supermarkets.

Schoolchildren now tramp through the clean barnyard with "hand-wash stations," not exactly his idea of rugged realism. But then again, tractors now have air-conditioning.

As farmers of his generation tended to do, Allnutt embraced frugality as a way of life.

Bruised tomatoes were not to be wasted. This accounted for his tomato juice, which also could be modified into Bloody Mary mix, which with heat and some corn tossed in became a zesty soup.

"Once in a while, I get a little heavy-handed with the spices," he admitted to a reporter years ago. This was chalked up to interruption by visitors and his apparent distrust of measuring cups.

Although he made some accommodations over the years, Allnutt remained stubbornly skeptical of some ideas that would end up being a boon to the farm business.

Ben Allnutt, who took over the business in the early 1990s from his father, had proposed pick-your-own berries a decade earlier. He said his father instantly disliked the idea because paying customers would take only the best berries, leaving many others. When it was a hit, the elder Allnutt gave in slowly.

"He was from Depression-influenced people," Ben Allnutt said. "He just didn't think it was morally acceptable to let those strawberries go to waste. I just thought it was fun.

"For him, his whole life, it was about work, the experience of work, the camaraderie of working with family or others," he said. "The joy was in the work. Which is the antithesis of people today."

Benoni Dawson Allnutt was born April 22, 1917. His first name derived from a Hebrew term for "child of my sorrow," and many in his family, which stretched back hundreds of years in Maryland, bore the same name.

He was the 11th of 12 children, but the youngest died as a teenager, leaving Benoni Allnutt the last child to leave the farm to attend college. Though he planned to be an engineer, he was recalled from the University of Cincinnati after a semester because his father developed cancer.

He took over full-time farming of the family's 350 acres at age 18. In later years, he told a Frederick reporter that his accidental occupation got started because "I didn't know any better" and that his siblings "had already flown the coop."

After World War II, he made an arrangement to sell sweet corn to a local cannery and transitioned to a horticulture-based operation by the 1960s. When the cannery left the area, Allnutt began selling produce house-to-house from a green Chevy pickup truck he drove to Chevy Chase and Washington. His sons would package the corn and tomatoes in the truck and run up sidewalks to ring doorbells.



The business climate changed with county development as well as Allnutt's own family needs. He began parceling off the land to send his five children to college (it now stands at 230 acres).

In the early 1980s, he became one of the first of the county's remaining farming patriarchs to voluntarily commit his land to the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, a county-state program. Through it, the farmer sells development rights but retains ownership of the farm.

From the county's perspective, this has helped preserve historic farmland as the pace of development and the rise in population have grown dramatically. As of 2002, when the last agriculture census was taken, there were 577 farms, and they took up 75,000 of the county's 316,000 total acreage (or 24 percent). Almost four decades ago, there were reportedly 634 farms taking up 36 percent of the total acreage.

Ben Allnutt said his father's motivation for joining the preservation program was to keep the farm as a unit. Also, with an eye on retirement, the program brought Benoni Allnutt several hundred thousand dollars, which allowed him to turn over the farm to his son.

During his career, Allnutt seemed to delight in his role as an eccentric. In what his family said was an expression of endearment, he threw tomatoes at friends and found earthy ways to tweak others. While butchering a hog, he once slipped a pig's eyeball into a man's coat pocket; the man's wife, who found it, was very surprised.

"If he wasn't teasing you, he didn't like you too much," said his son Bob. "If he was polite, that wasn't necessarily a good sign."