

Animal agriculture won't be replaced

By DIETER KRIEG and animals in the ecosystem and the agricultural economy, says B.R. Baumgardt, professor of animal nutrition and head of the Department of Dairy and Animal Science at Penn State University.

The Penn State educator made the remark in reference to some of the criticism that has been received by the industry in view of food shortages plaguing some parts of the world. Various groups doubt the validity of having animals be a part of agriculture, but Baumgardt notes that they are more than just food and fibre sources for man.

Speaking to a gathering of agribusiness people here earlier this year, Baumgardt noted that the American farm economy has become so efficient that it takes an average just 58 minutes of labor to buy food and beverages for one person per day. That contrasts with two hours and 39 minutes of labor per day to pay the equivalent of one man's average daily tax burden.

Animals, says Baumgardt, are necessary for nutrition, maintaining health, and the efficient conversion of remotely useful resources to the kind readily usable. Favoring neither plants nor animals in the total food

picture, the Penn State professor explained that "both plants and animals will continue to be important alternatives in the total mix of our food supply." Some of the reasons are given in the paragraphs which follow. The conclusion is that animal agriculture is not going to fade away in favor of greater utilization of plants, as some crystal ball gazers and social workers insist.

One reason for the optimistic outlook for animal agriculture is that per capita food consumption has increased for crop and animal products since 1960. Baumgardt readily admitted that animal products are not essential in a person's diet, but added that balancing the daily food intake without animal products could become quite a task.

Also, there is a relationship between per capita income and consumption of animal products. Higher incomes have allowed families to put a greater variety of foods on their tables, and animal products

are generally among the first to be increased. Aside from the better balance of nutrients these products provide, Baumgardt also noted that animal proteins are generally more palatable and add pleasure to eating.

Animal agriculture has been set back somewhat due to adverse publicity generated by some doctors and producers of ersatz items for butter, meat, and eggs. The latter has been especially susceptible to health arguments involving the cholesterol controversy. But in spite of all this, Baumgardt firmly maintains that many of these allegations have not been proven and animal products are indeed a healthy ingredient in the diets of most people.

Baumgardt answers charges to the contrary with advice to cut sugar intake, increase exercise, do less snacking and in general equip the body with greater responsiveness to stress. Animal products are not conducive to heart ailments in most cases, the Penn Stater said.

Animals are important also in converting one form of protein to another. Ruminants are a perfect example, as they make use of grasses and turn them into milk and meat. Cows, as a matter of fact, are protein synthesizers for man, Baumgardt's research shows. Aside from this, animals can make use of land which would otherwise not be suitable for agriculture - such as steep slopes and rocky terrain.

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