

# Mushroom growers facing pollution problem

By LAUREL SCHAEFFER  
Staff Correspondent

LEESPORT — Concerned about compost run-off caused by heavy rains, the Berks County Farmers Association, (BCFA) organized a meeting May 2 with area mushroom growers to discuss their problems and seek possible solutions. The meeting was held at the Berks County Agricultural Center, here.

Citing the problems faced recently by growers in Chester County where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) charged several growers with pollution of navigable waters, BCFA president Jack Kooker urged the area growers to seek a solution now, before it is too late.

As was the case with an Avondale, Chester County, grower who was indicted on six counts of pollution last year, the area growers

emphasized that their anti-pollution systems are 95 per cent effective. "It's only when we get very heavy rainfall such as two inches within a few hours that there are run-off problems for which we can not control," they argued. Voicing the opinion of the indicted growers who believe they lost their case because there are no standards or tolerances set up for the mushroom industry, the area growers are pushing for a solution.

Also present to discuss the mushroom growers' problem were Chris Allen, director of Natural Resources of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association, and Dean Heim, regional director, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

Allen explained the problems faced by livestock producers who have

essentially the same problem as far as run-off is concerned, to the area growers, and displayed a manure manual which was drawn up as a set of guidelines for their industry.

The manual, set up by the livestock producers in accordance with various regulatory agencies is a compilation of practices and information most farmers know already but serves as a guideline approved by the Department of Environmental Resources and the EPA for the producers.

Allen suggested that the mushroom growers might be able to compile a set of guidelines, and if approved by the proper authorities, could serve as a basis for their industry. The booklet would describe practices which are affordable and practical methods of composting already in use and or newly designed which

would be acceptable as anti-pollution practices.

Allen cautioned the growers to review other solutions before deciding to compile a booklet. "It is a very difficult task to do," he warned, "and once accepted would have to be followed."

Heim, who was in attendance mostly for the purpose of listening, said, that the Department of Agriculture is interested in

the mushroom growers problems, but warned those at the meeting not to sit back. "Something has to be done," he continued, "but don't let it be the government that does it."

Heim also commented growers and city people don't know enough about each others' problems and more public relations work is needed.

"Start to solve this

problem with only growers," he advised, "no one else knows what you need or can live with."

Concluding the meeting the growers decided to have the Berks County Farmers' Association mushroom committee evaluate the present situation and contact the county's 85 growers to stress the severity of the situation and question them on the guideline issue.

## Safety poster contest winners named

ELVERSON—Twin Valley FFA Safety committee chairman Barry Johnson has announced the winners of the FFA sponsored safety poster contest at Robeson Elementary Center.

Placing first was Kim Ferenchick daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Ferenchick of Mohnton; second place was awarded to Ethan Long son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Long of Birdsboro; and third was Sam Cunniss son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Con of Birdsboro.

Art teacher at Robeson is Mrs. Ruth Kurtz.

The FFA annually sponsors this contest in the hopes of providing fifth and sixth grade students with a better understanding of the many hazards which surround them everyday.



Discussing mushroom growers' problems at a recent Berks County Farmers' Association meeting were, left to right, Chris Allen, director of natural resources for PFA; Berks County Farmers Association president Jack Kooker; Nick Maggiaro, mushroom grower; and Dean Heim, regional director from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

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