

PDA's promotions department talks programs, problems

HARRISBURG — One of the main thrusts of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's budget this year is product promotion.

In the past several months there have been changes in the division's leadership while the department strives to put together a promotion package for state farm products.

Connie Harness, who emerged as chief of promotions after six months with the Department, said the promotion division has had problems but it getting on the track by virtue of hard work and long hours.

The appointment of the former Miss Pennsylvania to the Ag Department job last September was questioned in many quarters.

Although Ag Secretary Penrose Hallowell has said in the past he prefers to hire people who have some on-farm experience because he has found such experience valuable, Harness has none.

While conceding her ability to attract interest because of her title, some farm organizations question Harness' ability to handle farm questions.

They pointed out that, while people like former Miss America Anita Bryant have been used by other farmer organizations to promote a product, that person was used only to promote the product, not to develop a promotion program.

That task was left to marketing and promotion specialists or given to outside firms.

Harness said all promotions will be run from her department.

Promotion work has been divorced from the Bureau of Markets. Projects like the

commodity queens which used to be in Markets now are under Promotion.

Harness explained that her division is concerned only with events. Bureau of Markets will develop a program, like the ag logo, but Promotions will push it.

She pointed out that Markets is involved in major projects like international marketing and said her concern is with local projects like mall exhibitions, fairs, and shows.

The changes are being met with some chagrin both within and outside of the Department.

John Early, former director of the Rural Affairs department under which came promotions, left the job because of what he terms "conflict of management methods."

He said he left to return to his business, Early's Flower Box, Hummelstown. But he had served the Department as bureau director since the Scranton administration.

"I left to return to my business. I felt I could use my talents better elsewhere than the Department," he said.

He said the new methods used were "not acceptable" to him.

At the moment, the activities in the Rural Affairs Department are under Deputy Agriculture Secretary Chester Heim.

Among the questions raised by several observers of the promotions program is

the setting of direction of the programs, what those programs hope to accomplish, how goals will be set up, how accomplishments will be measured.

Although a major portion of the Agriculture Department's increase in budgeted expenditures is to go to promotions, Harness said she is not at liberty to discuss details of the evaluation of the success or failure of the projects her division will run.

She said evaluation reports will include estimated number of people reached and the types of information given out.

"A lot is not fully developed so I'm reluctant to go into great detail," she said, adding that Hallowell himself is formulating a plan on evaluation.

Hallowell said such evaluation will include statistics on raw product sales, including eggs and potatoes.

Harness said she was not aware of any problems with the various promotions, adding that care and feeding of the animals or birds at such events is the responsibility of the local promotions coordinator.

She said the promotion coordinator is responsible for caring for the animals and cleaning up after the show.

There have been problems transporting the exhibits, though. Currently the Department is trying to match hitch sizes in different regions of the state so display trailers can be moved about conveniently. Hallowell said such a move would cut both labor costs and logistics.

Harness said she had no tie-in with Capitol City Mall although she did appear in a commercial for the Mall.

Harness said she did the commercial at Christmas "as a favor" and added she was not doing commercials any more and that she got no pay for doing it.

Harness said she is looking into having the Farm Show build an incubator and duck slide for Promotion use since the one used for years at Farm Show is on loan from the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation and often is not available where and when the Department wants it.

Hallowell said the reason for the move was to allow the displays to be used in either end of the state without the related transportation

problems. He said another Country Store also is being put together for the same reason.

Rather than having live animals, the Department also is developing eight Agri-animals.

Harness said good progress was being made with the Agri-animals, people-size characters representing a given product.

Among the eight are Eggatha, who already has made appearances; Milton the Milk Carton and The Big Cheese, both of whom are being booked for dairy month; King Arthur Apple; Mushroom Munchkin; To-to Tomato; the Commonwealth Cow; and P.A. Spuds, a potato figure similar to Eggatha.

Eggatha was a learning experience, Harness said.

The character was too big to transport, taking up the whole back of a station wagon. The person inside has difficulty walking, can't sit, and often gets claustrophobic.

Harness said she hopes to have all future Agri-animals made of foam rubber with a collapsible frame for easier transport.

In March, the Promotions Division obtained per-

manent headquarters in the Agriculture Building, occupying the office space vacated by the Three Mile Island task force.

"We've been in our present quarters for six weeks to get all these programs together," she said. "We haven't had time to think."

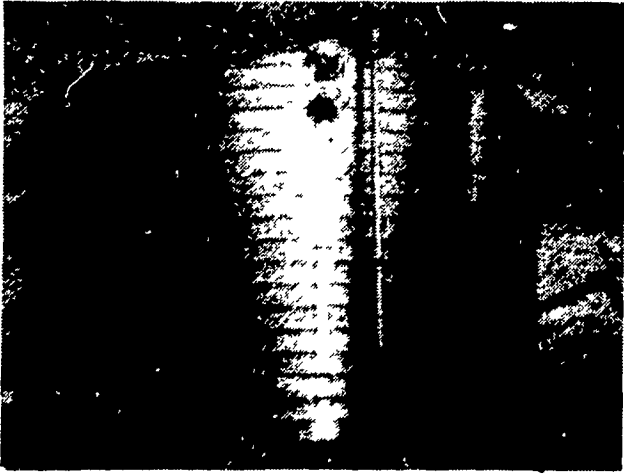
But, she added, the Promotions people have a full schedule coming up and, she assured, they "intend to get it all together."—CH



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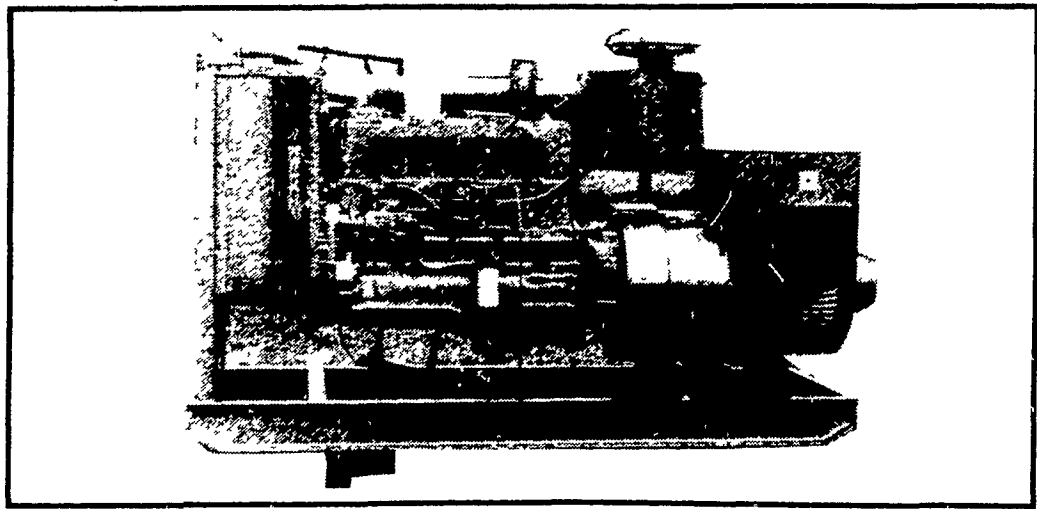
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