

# Meet the walking, talking promotion critters

BY SALLY BAIR  
Staff Correspondent

LANCASTER — If a giant piece of cheese starts walking toward you during a mall promotion for dairy products, don't be alarmed. Chances are it is simply The Big Cheese wanting to be a little friendlier and promote Pennsylvania's dairy products.

The Big Cheese and his counterpart Martin the Milk Carton are just two of a bevy of "agri-animals" being produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Markets in an effort to promote use of agricultural commodities.

The dairy agri-animals were introduced on Monday this week during the kick-off of the June Dairy Month celebration at the state capitol, and will become more well-known throughout the month of June as they appear throughout the state on behalf of the dairy industry.

The Big Cheese and Martin the Milk Carton are elaborate costumes which will be donned by Department of Agriculture employees and others in promotional events. Connie Harness, chief of agricultural promotions for the Bureau of Markets, said the animated characters will "meet the public, talk with kids and shake hands. They

will be outgoing and talkative."

She noted that at their first appearance they were somewhat shy although The Big Cheese overcame his shyness to give hugs to some in the crowd.

She added, "People in the costumes will be knowledgeable and will be able to answer questions about the commodities."

The concept is not totally finished, she said. The Department presently is developing brochures which will have a picture of the agri-animals for autographing and on the reverse side there will be nutritional information, recipes and other facts about the commodities. These brochures and others will be distributed by the characters as they promote their specific products.

In the case of Martin and the Big Cheese, additional literature is being provided by the Keystone Milk Marketing Board and the Atlantic Dairy Council.

It should come as no surprise that the two dairy characters are fully booked through the month of June. Harness explained each agri-animal will have his own calendar and bookings will be made through the promotion office.

"We will keep their schedules and know where they are," Connie said.

The agri-animals will be available to any agricultural group in the state, although transportation to events not sponsored by the Department of Agriculture will be the responsibility of those making the request.

In case taxpayers have visions of needing to hire transportation for these lovable creatures, Connie points out that both of them are foldable and collapsible so that they will fit easily into a station wagon.

It is also the responsibility of the sponsoring group to find someone to wear the costume. In the case of Department-sponsored events, Harness said either regional coordinators will wear the costumes or find someone else to wear them.

The costumes for the two dairy characters were paid for through a \$1,000 contribution of the Keystone Milk Marketing Council.

Harness said Martin the Milk Carton was selected as representative of all dairy products, and the carton includes a list of products made from milk.

The Big Cheese was selected because it was an easily made costume and because it represents Pennsylvania's growing cheese industry.

"We feel cheese stands as a food by itself," Harness said.

In Pennsylvania the dairy



A wink of the eye and a wave of the hand are extended to one and all by The Big Cheese. The Big Cheese is one of a whole family of 'agri-animals' used to promote Pennsylvania farm products.

industry is a billion dollar industry and it ranks fifth in the nation in production.

"We like to promote milk as the most complete, versatile food and one that's perfect with breakfast, lunch or dinner," Harness states.

She said they feel the concept of agri-animals will be especially appealing to children.

"We think children are an important audience because it is important for them to get nutritional information on the basic four food groups. We want them to see that milk is good for growing kids and that it builds strong bones and teeth. We also want to sell kids on the product. If we appear to kids they may ask Mom to buy. We think they are an influencing factor."

She said she also hopes children will take home the autographed pictures of the characters and keep them.

"This way they'll not only be reminded about the character but also will have the facts about the products in a language they can understand."

In addition to the dairy characters, the Department is also creating To-To the Tomato, Mushroom Munchkin, King Arthur Apple, the Baby Beef, Corny Cor-

nelius and P.A. Spuds. They will be made one at a time, and will be available for booking as each is finished.

Harness noted the Apple Marketing Board is helping to finance King Arthur Apple, and said that the agri-animal line-up is open to other animals as suggestions are made and funds become available.

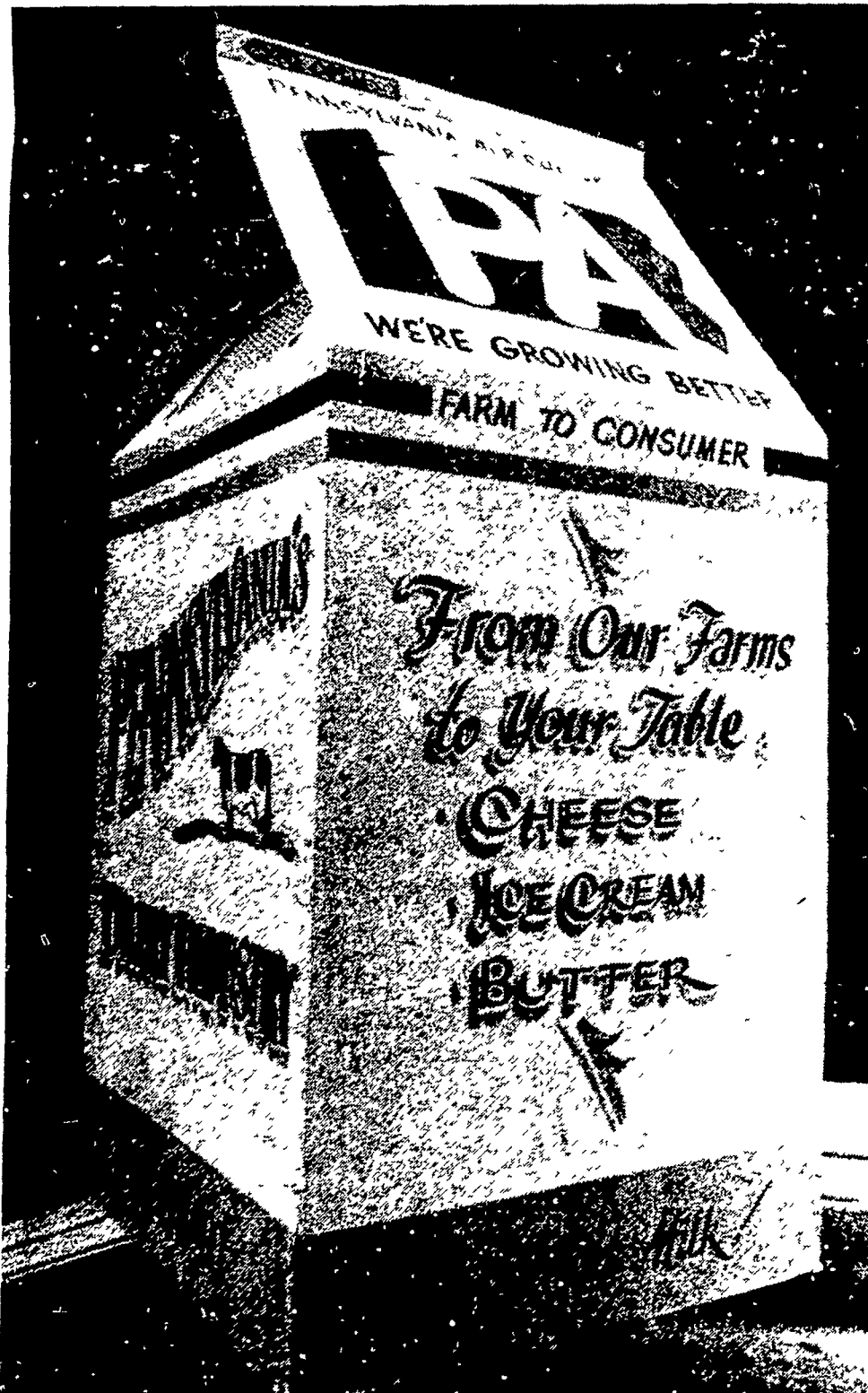
Promotion is the basis for the agri-animals, and Harness said she feels they will go a long way in promoting Pennsylvania products.

"We want to promote Pennsylvania agriculture and commodities. If we can't make agriculture number one in the economy, at least we can make it number one

in people's minds. We need to convince people how important it is to buy Pennsylvania products. We must let consumers know we have all the products available. Many do not realize how important it is to the economy."

She said the idea of characters came to her primarily because of the popularity of Sesame Street characters and others. Perhaps Martin the Milk Carton and The Big Cheese will become as familiar to children as Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch.

"If so, the result will be advantageous to both the dairy industry and to the consumers who use its nutritious products."



Milton the Milk Carton is one of two dairy promotion characters in the Agriculture Department's family of 'agri-animals'. They travel to shows, shopping centers, and fairs across the Commonwealth to promote dairy products.

