

# Eastern-Leprino cheese operation draws DER fire

BY JANE BRESEE

Staff Correspondent

**SOUTH WAVERLY** — Alleged improper waste disposal practices at the South Waverly cheese plant of Leprino Foods and Eastern Milk Producers Cooperative drew increasing fire this week from state environmental officials in both Pennsylvania and New York.

The practices involve two types of violations.

First, officials of Waverly, N.Y. and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation are considering action against Leprino for violation of waste discharge limits into the Waverly Sewerage Treatment Plant.

Also, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources is determining the seriousness of violation and what action should be taken against Eastern Milk Producers for negligent disposal of the whey from the cheese production process.

James Chester, Regional Director for the DER, brought the whey problem to a head last week when he addressed the spring meeting of the Bradford-Sullivan County Farmers Association at the Monroeton Fire Hall.

"Since the summer of 1979," Chester told the farm group, "we have tried to get the whey problem solved smoothly without being hardnosed. Leprino and Eastern said that they were wrong and promised to correct their practices.

"Now, we are as far as we can go and we feel that we have been deceived and have asked Leprino and Eastern to separate themselves from the process of getting rid of the whey."

Chester said that about 90,000 gallons of whey are produced each day as a by-product of the cheese making.

The DER official reaffirmed his position this week.

"Eastern should get out of the whey disposal business," he said.

"Their record has been one of repeated failures and negligence."

Eastern, he explained, holds a permit to spray irrigate the whey in sections of Smithfield Township in Bradford County. But application is supposed to be limited to an inch per acre per year.

"This area has been grossly overloaded," Chester said.

"There has been excess discharge runoff of 50,000 to 100,000 gallons and it has fouled a pond and wells."

Chester said that a penalty of \$17,000 had been levied against Eastern in late-1980, which included promises that operations, practices and even personnel would be changed.

The agreement called for a cessation of application in a certain area, according to Chester.

"In the past week, we've found the improper application of tens of thousands of gallons of whey in the same area where the operation was supposed to have been halted.

"We have been given numerous assurances that the practices would be changed, but there has been repeated failures to carry them out."

Chester also told the Bradford-Sullivan Farmers Association that the wells of the Masonite Corp. in East Towanda are being fouled up.

"You have a tremendous problem coming up around you," Chester told the farm group.

"You who are a part of Eastern Milk should be intimately involved in how to deal with the situation"

Eastern has a 20-year full supply contract with Leprino to provide the milk for the cheese plant. Eastern owns about 11 percent of the plant and its efforts to get financing to purchase the plant and lease it to Leprino have been unsuccessful.

The Farmers Home Administration just recently denied a \$20 million loan guarantee to Eastern, primarily for credit reasons.

Chester of the DER also mentioned the proposed location of a Schep's cheese plant in Wyoming County. Installation of a 1,000-gallon capacity sewage plant has been approved, he said, but what about the 160,000 gallons of whey that are produced each day.

He said that a plan to feed it to livestock is being investigated, wondering how many head are needed to consume these large amounts.

Chester said that water will be a hot and heavy problem during the coming year. He said that another regulation about to be acted upon are the vapor recovery systems on underground gasoline tanks. He said that a day is coming when the granting of extensions will run out for their installation.

"Another problem is the algae in lakes which is caused from the nutrients in agricultural fertilizer," Chester said.

"This problem was experienced a year ago and will likely occur again."

Chester told the farming audience to get involved in the



Regional Director of Department of Environmental Resources James Chester, right, explains regulations to Lewis Neuber, of Sugar Run, following spring banquet of the Bradford-Sullivan County Farmers Association. Chester severely criticized improper disposal practices involving whey from the Leprino Foods and Eastern Milk Producers cheese plant at South Waverly.

process of locating sites for hazardous waste dumps.

"What are you going to do when a company buys 500 acres in your area?" he asked.

"They will already have looked at the zoning. They'll hire two lawyers to appeal your protests through all the courts. All the state will do is look only at the criteria and regulations."

He further explained that the DER is being sued presently for allowing solid wastes to be dumped into a site, which is definitely unsuitable. But the mayor of the area and local legislators had insisted that the site be used.

Kevin Ferris, president of the 953-farm family organization, was

chairman of the meeting. A resolution to raise annual dues from \$35 to \$50 was passed.

Marilyn Bok, a member of the League of Women Voters, demonstrated and explained the electronic voting machine whose use will be decided in a referendum in the upcoming Primary Election.

Visitors at the meeting were Rep. Roger Madigan, Bradford County Commissioner William Gannon and wife, Barbara; Fred Tiffany, PFA director, and wife, Jean, a director on the PFA Women's Committee; and Jeff Patton, regional organization director.

## Research seeks

## to drought-proof corn

**LANCASTER** — While politicians, weather forecasters and nearly everyone else talk about the effects of drought on the economy, few U.S. crop scientists are actually doing something to help avert its disastrous blow on food supplies in the future.

But at least one company, DeKalb AgResearch, Inc., DeKalb, Illinois — a major supplier of hybrid corn and sorghum seed — has been working to improve food supplies for more than a decade. Their research has attempted to drought-proof the hybrid corn seed that farmers plant each spring.

One approach DeKalb researchers are actively investigating is a genetic system that induced semi-dormancy in order to protect corn plants during short drought periods. The goal is to develop hybrids that match or exceed present yields but do so with less water than is now required.

Benefits would be two-fold: (1) irrigation farmers could reduce water needs and irrigation costs and (2) growers in moisture-short areas could produce a respectable yield compared to little or nothing at all.

Much of DeKalb's research work focuses on a genetic system called "latente." This is the Spanish word for "dormant." Plants with the latente system have the ability to go dormant during drought periods and resume normal growth when revived by rainfall or irrigation.

Like other drought-tolerance

characteristics, the mode of operation of this latente system is difficult to pin down.

"This does not appear to be a simple one or two-gene complex which can be easily transferred into corn inbreds (parents of hybrids) for making new drought-tolerant hybrids," according to DeKalb's corn physiologist Ron Castleberry, DeKalb, Illinois.

Currently, DeKalb plant breeders are transferring this latente source of drought tolerance into modern hybrids. Company officials say "the hybrids are under test at many locations and look very promising."

Corn breeders say intensified efforts to drought-proof corn are already paying off for many farmers.

"Last season, DeKalb's new XL-25 corn hybrid demonstrated how built-in tolerance to dry weather stress can be a good ace-in-the-hole," DeKalb vice president Harold Noren explains, "At DeKalb's testing locations in drought-stricken Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Michigan, XL-25 managed to squeeze an average of 109.8 bushels per acre out of available moisture while 25 competitive hybrids yielded an average of only 99.1 bushels per acre."

Until scientists find a way to control the weather, you can bet that corn breeders will continue their search for better hybrids.



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