

## Mushroom promotion

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more than 33 cents a pound for mushrooms. One grower replied from the audience, "Then why am I filling my house again? I can't grow them for that."

Until recently mushroom growers have been an independent lot, but present financial conditions for the total industry have driven the various segments of the industry together for mutual help. The American Mushroom Institute is one corporate voice which hopes to have a substantial impact on saving the domestic industry.

Kooker, its newly appointed executive director serving since January of this year, reported on a number of promotional studies and research findings which have been in the works since he took office. To outline in broader detail, the promotion arm of the AMI, its promotion committee chairman, Joe DiNorscia took the floor after Wuest's presentation.

According to the promotion chairman, one possible solution to the economic problems facing the industry is to increase consumption through an extensive promotional program and direct advertising. DiNorscia said research into costs found it would take \$2 or 3 million dollars to finance such a program. Research also showed most promotion needs to be done east of the Mississippi, reported DiNorscia.

He pointed out there are seven hundred mushroom growers in the nation producing an estimated 1981 crop of 500 million pounds. Present consumption rates are 1 and 1/2 pound per person. The promotion goal is to increase consumption of fresh mushrooms to three pounds per person.

"West of the Mississippi the situation is better than east of the Mississippi," DiNorscia said. "West of the Mississippi they produce 150 million pounds and market 97 percent of these fresh. In the East, we produce twice that figure and sell only 35 percent fresh. The rest are processed."

Promotion chairman, DiNorscia told the group of growers that AMI is presently putting feelers out in Washington, D.C. to see if it is feasible for the federal government to establish a marketing order for the mushroom industry without a fixed ceiling of production, as is the case with all existing marketing orders. DiNorscia stressed the point that this possible marketing order would not be a "quantitative ceiling marketing order" but one which designates geographic areas for promotion and research program funding from the industry.

Studies conducted on the voluntary marketing association idea now in operation in Canada proved "mechanically infeasible," DiNorscia stated. The best shot at present, according to DiNorscia, is a federal marketing order. A variance will have to be approved to allow processed mushrooms to count in the marketing order, however, since only fresh produce is allowable under established orders.

"We are talking about an 18 to 24-month time frame here," DiNorscia added. "We have to do something in the meantime. Twenty-four months down the road could be too late."

During the question and answer session which followed DiNorscia's prepared presentation, specific

details and concerns were aired. It was pointed out the proposed promotion programs need funding from a possible marketing order to a figure in excess of two million dollars which computes to a 1/2 cent per pound nationwide.

Although the western half of the nation's growers already market 97 per cent of their mushrooms fresh, to exclude them from the marketing order revenue would cost the eastern growers a prohibitive 2 cents a pound, DiNorscia pointed out.

He also stated the marketing order would be administered federally and not by AMI or any one industry-related body.

AMI would put a bid in on the promotion along with other agencies, he stated. Kooker, the executive director for AMI, reported that 52 percent of the growers nationwide hold membership in AMI. This represents 55 percent of the mushrooms produced domestically.

A meeting is scheduled by AMI for October 14 at the Italian American Club in Kennett Square to hear how several commodities have successfully increased consumer demand. Invited to speak at that meeting, as outlined by Kooker, are representatives from the table grape commission and iceberg lettuce commission.

Kooker said he is optimistic getting grower approval for a federal marketing order after gaining a variance to include processed mushrooms in the order. He stated he had reached four advertising firms to work up possible interim promotional programs. In one program, AMI will help promote local mushrooms being offered for sale in larger local supermarket chains. The cost for such a program is \$100,000 minimum, according to Kooker.

Discussion of how to reach the individual growers to come up with funds for such an interim

promotion program resulted. The president of AMI, Steve Pizzini, said he was "astounded by the number of people here."

"We need to get going right now to help solve this problem. I'd like to see this industry survive," Pizzini said. "I am a second generation grower with two sons. I pledge \$1,000 to this campaign. Now we need 99 more growers to get that \$100,000!"

Earlier in the evening the group of basically all growers were surprised when a local canner, Tom DiCecco, asked to have the floor. He began by saying "for a canner to come in front of so many growers was either very foolish or very brave." He went on to say that "imports have made enodes so that domestic canners can not make costs." He said there is an oversupply because imports of processed mushrooms are taking up the market.

Then he stunned the group when he said, "I can't get too excited about promoting canned mushrooms. No amount of money will offset the Taiwan industry. You are talking about a labor force so cheap we will never match."

DiCecco said growers should concentrate on fresh promotion. "As a canner I say that." He explained that once a healthy demand for domestic fresh mushrooms is restored, growers will once again have the profit and production and demand sufficient for canners to buy their seasonal overruns and fresh market rejects at a price which would allow the canner to make a profit. DiCecco said he believes promotion of fresh mushrooms will help consumption enough to help the canner in the long run.

After AMI's president Steve Pizzini donated \$1,000 to the local promotion program, DiCecco matched his donation.

AMI director, Kooker closed the meeting with the proposal that the institute would send out correspondence to those in attendance to get feedback on additional promotion funding.

Representatives from Pennsylvania Farmers Association, the National Farmers Union, the Grange, AMI, Chester County Extension, and several local and state journalists attended the meeting.

## Pa. broiler placements up

HARRISBURG — Placements of broiler chicks in the Commonwealth during the week ending September 19 were 2,289,000, according to the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service.

The placements were seven percent above the corresponding week a year earlier and two percent above the previous week. Average placements during the past nine weeks were one percent below a year ago.

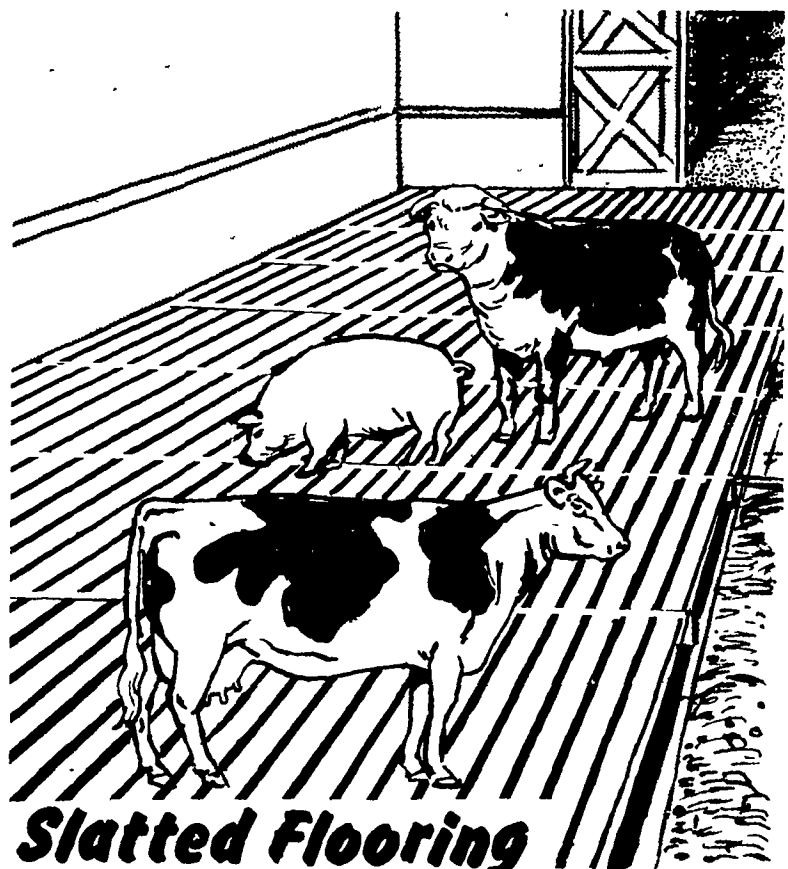
Placements in the 19 key poultry producing states were 78,478,000, slightly above the previous week and eight percent above the same week a year earlier. Average

placements in the 19 key states during the past nine weeks were nine percent above a year ago.

Broiler-fryers slaughtered in Pennsylvania under federal inspection during the week ending September 9 totaled 1,599,000, with an average liveweight of 4.04 pounds.



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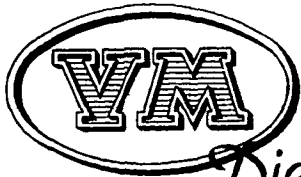
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