

# Mushroom growers ask foreign import quotas

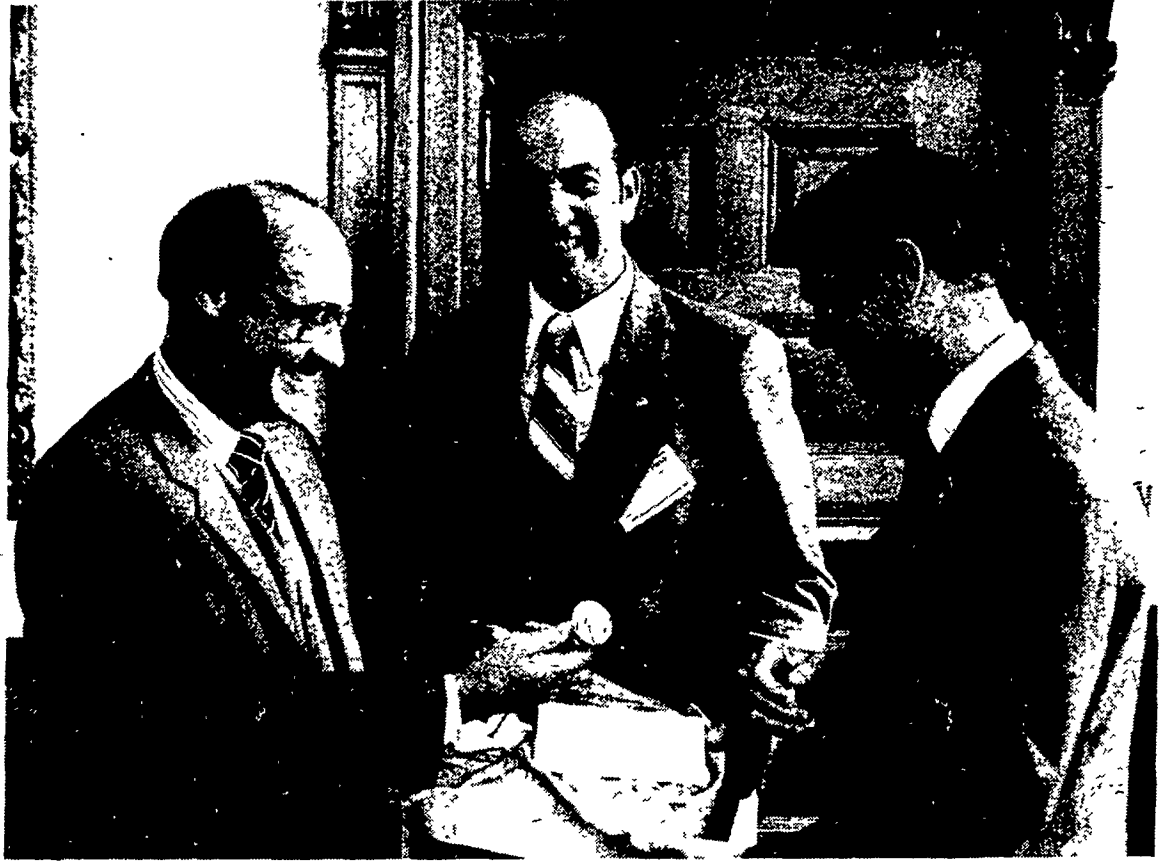
KENNETTSQUARE — Following a split-decision 2-2 vote, the U.S. International Trade Commission recently recommended a 21 million pound quota be put on imported mushrooms from China. As of Sept. 30, President Reagan has 60 days to negotiate an orderly marketing agreement with China, and other supplying countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea, impose a tariff or to take no action, reports Jack Kooker, executive director of the American Mushroom Institute, headquartered here.

"The president can now replace the increased duties proclaimed by President Carter with quantitative limitations under an orderly marketing agreement," Kooker

stated. "Such an agreement should use the 78 million pound base year recommended by Commissioner Moore in 1980.

"Taiwan has already asked the president to suspend the present increased duties and negotiate an orderly marketing agreement with the principle supplying countries. And the Korean Agriculture Department has stated there can be no improvement in their exports to the United States because of continuing People's Republic of China dumping which is expected to continue unless the U.S. sets up an import quota for each export country."

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture reports the U.S. and European Community account for 38 and 28



Joe Versagli, Sr., center, president of the American Mushroom Institute and a mushroom grower from Landenberg, Chester County, was all smiles last Wednesday as he and AMI's executive director, Jack Kooker, presented U.S. Agriculture Secretary John Block with a basket of Pennsylvania mushrooms. That same day, AMI delivered 1,100 pounds of mushrooms to members of Congress, all donated by Keystone state growers



Discussing the current economic dilemma facing mushroom growers with Berks County legislator Gus Yatron, seated, are from left, Bernie Ciuffetelli, Avondale; Howard Malick, Kennett Square; Henry Roberts, Toughkenamon; and Tony Maddalozzo, Avondale, partially hidden by AMI's Jack Kooker.

percent of world canned mushroom imports, respectively. Where the E.C. limits its imports to one-third of its market, imports to the U.S. account for more than 50 percent of the domestic market.

"Unless the Chinese mushroom cloud — the yellow peril — which hangs over the U.S. market is discharged soon by an orderly marketing agreement, its export

lightning will destroy the Taiwanese and Korean share of the U.S. market and materially affect any chances of the U.S. (mushroom) industry adjusting to this extremely serious situation," emphasized Kooker.

Since 1979, China has rapidly established itself as the dominant exporter of mushrooms, the AMI director explained. In 1979,

Chinese exports were only three percent of total U.S. imports. In the first six months of 1982, Chinese imports plus imports from its satellites Hong Kong and Macao accounted for 80 percent of the imports.

"A marketing agreement (under Section 203 of the Trade Act of 1974) limiting imports to 40 percent

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## Berks dairyman picks mushroom career

BY SHEILA MILLER

KENNETT SQUARE — The American Mushroom Institute, the 27-year-old organization that represents the nation's 30 mushroom-growing states, is headquartered here in a remodeled brick home along busy Route 1, just 30 minutes from Philadelphia.

Serving as executive director to this mushroom organization which boasts 250 members out of a total 585 growers nationwide is former Berks County dairyman Jack Kooker.

Kooker, who left his 22-year career as a dairy farmer in Blandon, accepted the role as

spokesman for AMI two years ago, and stepped into a job that calls him to Washington D.C. at least twice a week and finds him jetting all the way to California to meet with mushroom growers there.

Although the difference between raising mushrooms and milking 100 registered Holsteins would seem to be as different as black and white, Kooker did not come to the job and its unending challenges unprepared.

After having made the decision to leave dairying, Kooker pursued a master's degree in political science from Penn State at the local Berks Campus. While attending evening classes for four

years, Kooker spent his days working for a Temple mushroom operation owned by Nick and Anthony Maggiaro.

"I got my exposure to the mushroom industry through working at Winter Garden Mushroom Farm," Kooker says, adding he did everything from picking mushrooms to driving trucks.

During the same period, Kooker devoted a great deal of his time serving as the Berks County president to the county's Farmers' Association. Now, when lobbying for the mushroom industry, Kooker says he works under the umbrella of various agricultural organizations, including Farm Bureau, Grange, and Farmers' Union.

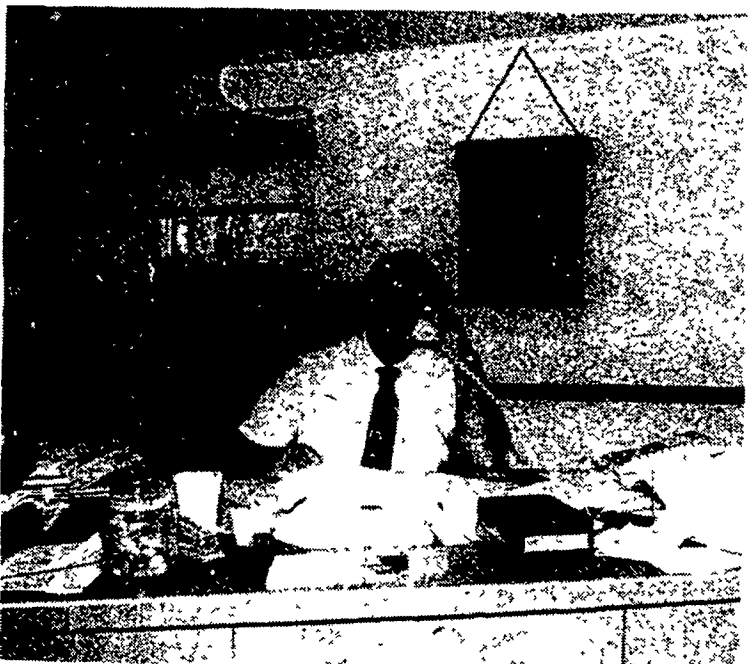
While he was dairying in Berks County, Kooker also served as chairman of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Advisory Council and chaired two of the three state milk referendums. His experience in conducting these referendums has given him the background for carrying out a similar market promotion question within the mushroom industry, (See related story).

Kooker, who says he has tried to model himself after the late Jerry Litton, a legislator, lobbyist and cattleman who was killed in a plane crash, comments his motivation revolves around representing all of agriculture well. "I know how important agriculture is, not only to Pennsylvania and the nation, but also the world," he says.

One thing Kooker doesn't like is the word "industry" and its link to mushrooms. "I prefer to call it mushroom agriculture. Somehow the word industry gives people the connotation that mushrooms aren't a vital part of agriculture,"



Helping Jack with the AMI office work are Tina McLenna, left, secretary-receptionist; Pat Hash, seated, bookkeeper; and Alma Rigler, assistant executive director.



Working as the American Mushroom Institute's executive director keeps Jack Kooker, a former Berks County dairy farmer, hopping. Answering questions from national newspaper and magazine reporters is an everyday occurrence here at the AMI's national headquarters in Kennett Square.

he explains.

Putting semantics aside and going to statistics, no one can argue with figures that show Pennsylvania is the leading state in mushroom production, harvesting 273 million pounds this year. In the U.S., mushroom production reached 517 million pounds, valued at \$419 million. And figures released by crop reporting agencies estimate production will continue at about the same level next year, with growers using 141 million square feet to raise their "underground" crop.

To help pay for the services they receive in promoting and

protecting their special agricultural commodity, mushroom growers pay AMI a yearly dues of one cent per square foot of production. And Kooker quickly points out the fact that battling foreign imports which threaten to hurt U.S. mushroom agriculture takes thousands of dollars and producer support. Helping Kooker and the AMI board of directors in this ongoing fight are three full-time employees: Alma Rigler, assistant executive director of AMI; Pat Hash, bookkeeper; and Tina McLenna, secretary-receptionist.