



Members of the Elizabethtown Area Grange #2076 were found "at the fair" this Tuesday, concreting this building at the Elizabethtown Fairgrounds. As well as donating their labor, the grangers contributed about \$2500 to concrete the building. Explained project chairman Kenneth Myer, "We make milkshakes here at the fair every year, and that's how we make a large portion of our money, so we decided to put some money back into the fair." Pictured here are Ken and Sam Myer, Bob and Joe Brant, and Dennis Drager.

Avian influenza depresses egg prices

UNIVERSITY PARK — Egg consumers needn't worry. The avian influenza that threatened half of Pennsylvania's egg supply last year will do nothing but keep egg prices down for the remainder of this year, a Penn State agricultural economist says.

"As of now, AI (avian influenza) means lower prices for the consumer," egg and poultry marketing specialist Kermit Birth said Monday. "That's because producers outside of Pennsylvania reacted to high prices and increased egg production."

Pennsylvania's avian influenza quarantine, in effect for nearly a year, was lifted Oct. 4. To prevent spreading the contagious disease, 15 million chickens were destroyed, costing the federal government \$50 million.

But because it "takes only six months or less to grow pullets to replace hens, and layers can be kept in production for longer periods," Birth says the egg industry "has been able to expand egg production."

"Increasing egg production is easier than decreasing it," he adds.

Birth explains the drop in egg prices this way:

Egg prices were down a year ago, so producers took moves to cut back on egg output. Then the avian influenza hit. Many layers had to be destroyed.

Producers in other areas of the United States then kept layers in production for longer periods. At the same time, producers ordered more pullets for flock replacements. Many of these pullets are now being housed as laying hens.

"There are about 25 percent more pullet chicks being grown in the United States this year than last year," Birth says. "The industry overreacted."

Pullets were used to replace the hens kept in production "longer than they have been in previous years," Birth says.

The result? From February to April last year, 23 percent of the United States' egg-producing chickens had been put through a rest period. Only 18 percent were put in this rest stage for the same period last year.

Birth points out that Pennsylvania egg producers accounted for only 6.5 percent of the nation's supply last year. But Pennsylvania is a major egg supplier for the New York City and Philadelphia markets, he says, and those areas, as well as the rest of the United States, experienced high egg prices during the influenza outbreak.

Although egg producers who lost flocks lost income last year, Birth says the industry is rebounding well.

"The industry can always come back strong," he says. "At least AI gave us a chance to learn more about flock management."

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