

Maryland Women's Ag Forum Explores International Trade

BY SHARON SCHUSTER
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COLLEGE PARK, Md. — The Maryland Women's Agricultural Forum met March 5 to examine "International Trade and Its

Impact on Maryland Agriculture," at the University of Maryland, College Park campus.

The forum was scheduled as a follow-up to the panel discussion of the same issue at the group's fall

meeting in Annapolis. Many attendees of the prior forum went away feeling there had not been enough time to delve into the issue of international trade thoroughly, thus, the March follow-up.

Dr. Earl Brown, international trade specialist, gave an overview of the agricultural trade situation with the presentation of a film. "Agricultural trade is a large, complex, and very competitive business. The stakes are high. The rewards can be excellent. But the risks can be devastating," advised the narrator.

"There are about 200 million metric tons of grain traded in the world every year," said Brown. "The United States accounts for about 35 percent of that." Brown explained that the long run demand for "the big three" — corn, wheat and soybeans — will be in the less developed countries of the world.

Brown attributed the decrease in U.S. agricultural exports from \$44 billion in 1981 to \$26 billion last year, to factors such as a stronger dollar, overpricing, and a worldwide recession. He said tonnage will go up in 1987, "because we've lowered the

prices. It looks like we are going to have a lot of excess production and every country is going to have to reduce production until prices get back to normal."

Dr. Raymond Miller, vice president for agricultural affairs and dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Maryland, served as moderator for a panel discussion on "The Future For Agricultural Trade." Members of the panel were James Vertrees of the U.S.D.A., Dennis Avery of the U.S. Department of State, and Paul Drazek, assistant director of national affairs for the American Farm Bureau Federation.

"Here we are, locked in this strange, stunted, agricultural global competition," said Avery. "The biggest problem for our farmers is that farm subsidies have raised our production costs to the point where we're not as competitive as we could and should be," he added. In summation, he said, "a lot of things are going to change — they are going to have to change. The production and demand trends do not compute."

"Foreign countries are downright angry with us right

now," said Drazek in his overview. Bruno Julien, European economic community representative to the United States, concurred with that opinion of how the United States is viewed by the rest of the world with regard to agricultural trade.

Drazek said, "What we need to do, by bringing the market price down, is send a signal to these countries that perhaps you should reduce production and don't expect the United States to do the whole thing for you as we did in 1983. We're not going to do it by ourselves."

Vertrees echoed this sentiment. "By and large we bear the burden of the world's adjustment to trade balance because we are the largest producer."

Louis LoBianco, deputy administrator, sales and marketing for the Port of Baltimore, was present to promote use of the port. "We're not moving a lot of grain through Baltimore," reported LoBianco. "We've got 12 million ton capacity. We moved less than 2 million tons last year," he said. "Let me assure you that there is a commitment from the thousands of people that work for the port that we are very interested in working with ag, in trying to help them find markets, and trying to help them become competitive in those markets," he said. "If it takes a sacrifice on the part of labor, we think they're going to give it," he added.

Panelists and members of the audience also place the blame for today's agricultural trade crisis on "lack of preparation and innovativeness. What we need are some market development frontiersmen," suggested one observer. Peter Willoughby of the Maryland Department of Agriculture addressed this concern with practical ideas that he brought back from his recent tour through the European Community. He called his presentation a "show and tell" session.

"What does the customer want?" he asked. "Create it," he suggested, with reference to gourmet vegetables, custom grown products that bear logos or are in specific shapes. People laughed when yogurt went on the market in the United States. Now those producers are "laughing all the way to the bank," said Willoughby. Drinkable yogurt is the most recent innovation to hit the European market, and it is reportedly a big hit.

He showed several examples of "value added" products, such as the potato pancakes being marketed by Ireland. Promotion is an important part of marketing. He illustrated the point with brochures promoting beef, dairy products and even Texas Barbecue on the state, county and local levels in Europe.

"Seventy-one percent of Canadian products will find their way into U.S. markets," said Willoughby. He suggested that the U.S. agricultural community needs to "do our homework."

Workshop

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Bruno Julien, European Economic Community Agriculture representative to the United States, was one of several people who discussed international trade at the March 5 Maryland Women's Agricultural Forum.

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In those first weeks, the corn plant's most vulnerable to lasting harm from soil pests including rootworms, wireworms, seed corn maggots and nematodes

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