

Swine Management News



Dr. Richard Barczewski
 Extension County
 Agricultural Agent
 University Of Delaware

LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS AS ANIMAL ADVOCATES

When the clock radio went off at 5:00 Sunday morning, I was awakened by disturbing news. The station it was tuned in to was carrying an interview with the author of a newly published book on animal rights.

As I lay there listening to the 30-minute interview, I realized once again that this issue will be with us for a long time. We can't win the battle by sitting back and waiting for it to pass.

The author was careful not to come on too strongly, even though she has in the past equated boys to dogs to mice. The interviewer admitted she didn't agree, on the whole, with the author's position or objectives. However, when the subject of veal came up, the interviewer immediately volunteered that she didn't eat it, but then asked her guest to elaborate on how veal is raised.

The animal industry is at a crossroads. Attacks on how we raise our animals are more frequent and the trend will continue. It's no longer enough to sit back and react to the misinformation being spread by animal rights advocates.

What can animal agriculture do and, more specifically, what can the swine industry do to counter the claims of these groups? We must speak in a unified voice. Swine producers must join in an effort with other livestock producers to educate consumers about modern livestock-production practices.

Consumers today care about how livestock is raised, but we have done such a good job of removing the general public from

knowledge about our practices that it is imperative that we get our story out now.

Animal rights advocates use schools and the media to discuss their beliefs and spread misinformation and half-truths about animal production. Some school teachers don't know the difference between a baby horse (foal) and a pony, and have a limited understanding of modern agriculture altogether.

The animal rights movement has filled people's minds with terms such as factory farming, which for those people who don't know from experience conjures up visions of machine-like animals pumping out young in assembly-line fashion. Producers have to make sure the public knows and understands the truth.

Programs like Ag in the Classroom must ensure that agriculture is depicted as it really is and not in an overly glamorized way. Animal agriculture has evolved into a modern and efficient system of food production. Is it perfect? No. Are we willing to change it? Yes — as better ways of producing livestock are developed — better for the farmer and better for the animals.

It disturbs me when I hear a program like the one I woke up to this morning. If I didn't know the issues and the background of the author and her views, I wouldn't be as upset as I am. What I heard was a watered-down version of what this writer and the organization she works for believe.

If a school contacts you as a livestock producer to give a talk to school children on your work, be receptive. Take the time to teach youngsters and the teachers about your farming practices. If you are uncomfortable about talking to groups, contact your county farm

Council Releases Water Quality Video

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC) released a newly-developed educational video on water quality for member use in local communities to help address consumer concerns about environmental issues.

Entitled "Our Bread and Water," the 12-minute video examines groundwater contamination and discusses innovative measures such as integrated pest management and best management practices that farmers are employing to ensure responsible use of fertilizers and pesticides. It features interviews with health scien-

tists, environmentalists, farmers, cooperative executives, and government officials.

"Environmental issues will be of critical concern to the public throughout the 1990s," said NCFC President Wayne A. Boutwell. "We believe this video and other educational materials now being developed will help address many honest concerns that consumers may have about agriculture and the environment."

Boutwell said the video is intended primarily for use with civic clubs and other consumer audiences. He added that it may also be used as a TV public ser-

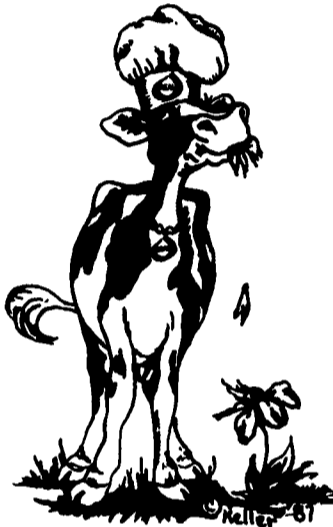
vice report, in school and youth presentations, and with co-op boards, member meetings, and young farmer programs.

The NCFC president noted that various agricultural cooperatives have been working closely with their farmer members in developing environmentally sound programs which will permit this country to continue meeting its food production goals.

Copies of the 1/2-inch VHS video are available at \$20 each from NCFC's member and institutional relations department. To order, contact Don Hanes or Norvalla Reid at (202) 626-8700.

bureau to see if they might have someone willing to talk to school groups. Commodity princesses are usually well-versed in discussing animal production practices with school-aged children, too, so don't overlook them as possible speakers.

The time to get proactive is now. Animal agriculture is not a method of animal abuse; it's the model of animal husbandry. Get the word out any way you can.



EPA Survey Finds Well Water 'Sound'

WASHINGTON D.C.— A drinking water survey released recently by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should reassure Americans -- particularly those in rural America -- that their drinking water is safe.

EPA's drinking water well survey measured the occurrence of pesticides and nitrates in both community and rural drinking wells. The data indicated nitrate occurrence in about half the wells tested, although in only a handful of cases did the level exceed EPA's maximum contaminant level of 10 parts per million.

"The story here is that virtually all -- or 96 out of 100 -- of the wells tested were perfectly safe and contaminant-free," said TFI President Gary D. Myers. "That may come as a surprise to some environmental groups that have been seeking to force farmers to change their production methods

to protect groundwater," he said.

"It's clear that the best way to feed a burgeoning population and protect groundwater at the same time is by using commercial fertilizer," Myers said. "Fertilizer is a far more manageable nutrient source that nitrogen from legumes, manure, or other sources. Today's EPA report shows that farmers and our industry have managed fertilizer well, and that we need to continue to improve our management in order to protect the environment."


Myers said, "A nitrate is a nitrate, regardless of source. This data tells us nothing about the source of nitrates. Many states have already conducted nitrate studies which indicate that nitrate occurrence above a natural background level can usually be traced to a poorly constructed well or other point sources."

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