

Is Alternative Ag A Viable Option?

DOVER, Del. — An exploration of the alternative and sustainable agriculture movements were one of the topics addressed at Ag Forum '92: Opportunities and Challenges recently at Delaware Technical and Community College in Georgetown.

Alternative and sustainable agriculture have been buzz words in the agricultural community for several years now, but they mean different things to different people. Alternative agriculture is generally thought to mean introducing non-traditional crops into an area or finding creative new ways to market an old product.

Sustainable agriculture is slightly different. It generally means adopting production techniques that will sustain a profitable business but also put less stress on the environment.

Ferdinand Wirth, marketing manager for the department of agriculture, led a discussion about efforts to develop alternative agriculture in Delaware. His talk focused on the development of new crops in the area such as sorghum and wine grapes.

Dr. Edward R. Jones, a professor in the department of agriculture and natural resources at Delaware

State College, discussed the concept of sustainable agriculture — how successful that movement has been and where it may be headed.

In addition, three recipients of

the department of agriculture's alternative agriculture/marketing research grants discussed the problems and successes they had getting their projects off the ground.

Other seminar topics included trucking laws and safety, environmental regulation as it affects agriculture, and aquaculture opportunities.

Backus Highlights Holstein History

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Pennsylvania's first consignment sale to raise funds for hosting a national convention was held in 1954; the sales date was set for Good Friday.

"How ignorant we were to set that day," Backus related. "Never again."

A similar less-than-favorable buyer turnout occurred the year a sale was set for the opening day of deer hunting season—a date picked by non-hunters.

"Talk about being lonely," Backus wryly remembered.

The sales and pedigree specialist praised Pennsylvania Holstein's Bill Nichol for the foresight to start the spring calf sales.

Though sales offering as many of 150 head of calves and heifers were almost unprecedented, they drew in buyers from across the country, especially California.

One of those was Amelio Curti, who Backus cited as a forerunner and trend setter in buying cattle using the sire Predicted Difference as a gauge of pedigree value.

Fighting the scourge of Bangs disease over the years was a battle Backus remembers well. He cited one sale in which a heifer sold for \$1400, was then announced as not having been vaccinated, and then resold for \$700.

Scattered through Backus memories of cattle through their sales arenas are names that live on in the famed pedigrees of the

Holstein breed: Lucifer, Ivanhoe, Whirlhill Kingping. Even now, he noted, five of the top seven Holstein bulls have their roots in Pennsylvania.

"The breed has always belonged to everyone," Backus observed, relating how the bulk of notable contributions and outstanding cow families have originated in farmer-breeder herds. "Anyone can breed the greatest daughter of the greatest sire."

With less than half the cows of a half-century ago in this country, and two-and-one-half times as many registered ones, Backus proclaimed that the Golden Age of registered Holsteins is not some fading part of history, but today.

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