

50th Anniversary Of A.I. In Pa.

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Lancaster Farming Staff
STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — The discovery of the technology of artificial insemination is said to be as important to modern agriculture as the discovery of hybrid corn.

And as of Tuesday, August 18, it will have been exactly 50 years since that is has been in organized use in Pennsylvania.

Given the average age of the Pennsylvania dairyman, most were about 10 years old when the first cow was bred by organized artificial insemination in Pennsylvania.

That event was performed by Lewisburg veterinarian Dr. James Muffley and took place on a farm near Lewisburg on August 18, 1942, according to Dr. Larry Specht, a dairy specialist with the Penn State University College of Agricultural Sciences Department

of Dairy and Animal Science.

Though the success of A.I. in other domestic animal species has not been close to that in dairy cattle, without a doubt, experts say, organized artificial insemination is one of the main reasons dairy cattle breeds have improved in overall structure, health and performance in that time.

Recognition of the importance of the technology and the cooperation of people it took to make it successful is the reason behind the PSU department's call to remember just how quickly the industry has changed.

That is progressive agriculture and it is to be highlighted during Ag Progress Days August 18, 19 and 20 at Rockspring, in Centre County.

"To commemorate the date, the Dairy and Animal Science Department . . . is developing an exhibit that will feature the past, present

and future of the state's A.I. industry," Specht said this week.

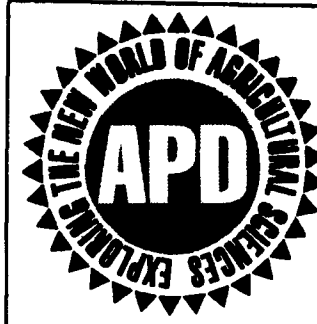
The exhibit is to be located in the PSU Dairy and Animal Science tent. The tent is to be located near the horse showing, uphill from the main Ag Progress tent city.

The display is to consist of three display panels with illustrations, pictures, maps, and old A.I. industry artifacts.

More importantly, those who visit the display can expect to meet and talk with Dr. John Almquist, a pioneer of many of the the present day semen handling techniques and was instrumental in the success of artificial insemination.

Also, Harvey Shaffer, as an extension specialist worked for more than 30 years in the areas of insemination technique and reproductive efficiency.

The display is put together as a result of the work of a committee which includes these Shaffer and



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Almquist and three members of the Department of Dairy Science — Specht, Dr. Mike O'Conner and Dr. Gary Killian. Killian chaired the committee.

"All veterans of the industry, present day employees and dairyman are urged to stop at the exhibit booth and visit with Almquist and Shaffer," Specht said.

There they will learn about the Pennsylvania history of the industry.

Even with the current successes in A.I., there is much to learn and much to come, Specht said. A review of the history of the development of the tool helps in trying to understand the industry as it exists and where it most likely will go.

For example, Specht said, four additional cooperative units organized to offer insemination service following the success of the first one in 1942. They were Lehigh Valley Cooperative Farmers in Allentown in 1943; Southeastern ABC in Lancaster in 1944; Northeastern ABC, in Tunkhannock in 1945; and Western ABC in Clarion in 1945.

In 1964, the Western ABC joined with Southeastern ABC to form Atlantic Breeders Cooperative at Lancaster, where it is still headquartered. Atlantic now works with Eastern A.I. of Ithaca, N.Y., and Louisiana ABC of Baton Rouge in a federated cooperative.

Also in 1964, there was another merging of cooperatives with First Pa. ABC, Northeastern ABC and Lehigh Valley Cooperative Farmers going over the state line to join with New Jersey ABC. The consolidated cooperative was named Northeastern Breeders Association (NEBA).

In 1971, NEBA federated with the Maryland-West Virginia Cooperative to form Sire Power. Sire Power recently consolidated all operations at Tunkhannock, from where they work with Northern Ohio Breeders Association (NOBA) and the Kansas ABC (KABSU) under the name of Allied Genes.

There were more than 100 A.I. associations in business in the 1950s in Pennsylvania. Now there are fewer than 10 major organizations.

But there are other aspects of history which can't go unnoticed.

Less than 25 years ago, it was not uncommon to hear of a herdsman injured or killed by his bull. And though some small family farms continue to use bulls, either alone or in conjunction with A.I., it is now more of a rarity to hear of a disastrous event involving a bull.

Specht said that the average milk production of a 1942 Pennsylvania milking cow was 5,000 pounds. Today it is 15,100. "That's almost tripled," Specht said. "It's not all genetics, but a good bit is."

"Prior to A.I., we were using bulls that were insufficiently sampled. When A.I. was sampled, we made exceptional progress since 1970," he said.

It was in the 1960s and 70s that techniques for storing and maintaining frozen semen was successfully discovered, along with techniques for preserving viability.

It is now common to see semen storage tanks on a dairy farm. With the success of handling techniques, freezing and thawing, the cost of breeding top quality dairy cattle has diminished significantly.

Also, the advent of artificial

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