

PSU Dean Hood: Farm Smarter, Educate To Survive

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Lancaster Farming Staff
HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — The dean of Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences said Thursday that, in order to survive, agriculturalists in the Northeast must manage more, develop their own markets, and become more involved in their local, urbanized communities.

Dr. Lamartine Hood, dean of PSU College of Agricultural Sciences, was the featured speaker at the annual convention of Agway, held at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center.

The convention was actually one of three regional conventions held this year. Traditionally, Agway held its annual convention in Syracuse, N.Y., near its headquarters.

Hood had been asked to com-

ment on his view of the future of agriculture in the Northeast.

While he didn't say specifically what his vision of the future of agriculture would be, he did say that he could foresee a continuing role for a diversity of agricultural endeavors.

According to Hood, success in the future will depend on an "individual and collective ability to address issues and capitalize" on opportunities.

"We must convert challenges into opportunities," he told the audience of several hundred farmers and Agway employees.

He said that there is "no question that (farming) is changing. Agriculture will be carried out in an urbanizing environment."

According to the dean, farmers across the Northeast face several common challenges — operating

in a way that ensures a minimal negative impact to the environment, and ensures clean water and healthy, wholesome food.

"Obviously, urban pressure is different for everyone, but many challenges are common across counties, across the state and the region," Hood said. "There are many issues that we in agriculture are deeply involved in."

He said that in 1990, the College of Agricultural Sciences conducted a random survey as part of an ongoing effort to determine the effectiveness of extension programming and public educational needs.

The survey asked, "Compared to what is being done now, what priority do want in the following areas in the future?"

Hood said there were about 50 items listed on the survey for

comment.

Of the 7,500 surveys sent out, the college received 3,600, which is an extraordinary response to a survey, he noted.

But, according to Hood, the common theme in the responses was the environment. He said six of the top items dealt with the environment — safe disposal of industrial wastes; clean water; protection of natural resources; safe sewage handling and treatment; preservation of farmland; and safe use of agricultural chemicals.

That compares to a response to a 1980 survey in which farmland preservation was the only environmental issue that was of major public concern.

He said the urbanization of Pennsylvania's historic agricultural areas have also created a different environment for doing business.

He said that despite the demands being put on local communities by the "new neighbors" — such as increased demands for services, and the increased congestion — they also represent opportunities.

According to Hood, farmers of the future will be the ones who see the new neighbors as increased marketing opportunities, sources of local revenues and stimulants to the local economies.

And he said that the neighbors also represent political power.

"Our new rural residents can and will exert influence on every area," Hood said.

Increased pressure to regulate livestock operations, nutrient management and pesticide application controls have been brought about people who have moved to "the country" and have changed it, he said. But, it will not end. "Other issues will follow," Hood said.

Therefore, he cautioned farmers that in order to keep a place in the new communities, they must become more involved.

"The 'we-were-here-first' attitude isn't going to get it done," Hood said.

Overall, Hood said there are six main things he wanted to impress upon the audience as what they will have to do to succeed in the Northeast:

- Make a commitment to management and enhanced profitability.
- Be good neighbors and involved citizens.
- Commit to foods systems education. Educate neighbors face to face. Invite them to the farm. Hire their youth.
- Form strategies for marketing. Build alliances, partnerships and linkages.
- Understand and respond to the market place.
- Be comfortable with change.

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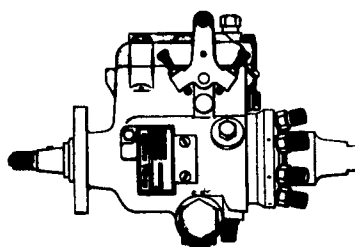
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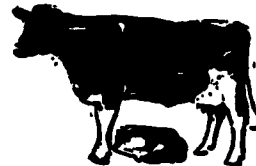
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