

Reading Terminal Market Needs Farmers' Produce

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lishing a meeting in January this year to discuss some options to increase the food distribution system in the city of Philadelphia, home to about 5 million people. Already, three farmers markets are in place, including the Reading Terminal market in center city Philadelphia. Two are scheduled to start in May, with a plan to bring a total of 10 markets altogether to the city during the next year and a half, according to Perry.

The Reading Terminal market is a "traditional" farmers market, selling food directly to institutions in the city and providing for the sale of produce at the Reading Terminal Market. The Trust is working to make sure "more Pennsylvania-grown farm-fresh food ends up in stores in the area," said Perry.

In a telephone interview, Perry indicated the Trust is more interested in having farmers set up direct-sale contracts rather than setting up specific auction sites such as exist throughout the region. They want to eliminate the "middleman" and keep bureaucracy to a minimum.

The Trust conducted a meeting late in January this year to obtain input from farmers. Another meeting is planned for next month, according to Perry.

The Reading Terminal Farmers' Market is working to contact farmers groups, such as the Lancaster Farmland Trust and others, to spread the word about the potential of marketing produce.

Also as important, the Trust wants to help market the products with a specific label, such as used by New Jersey markets ("Jersey Fresh") or statewide commodity organizations ("Washington State Apples"). The label cannot be limited to Pennsylvania-grown produce, since much of the produce comes from the tri-state region. A suggested name would be "Delaware Valley Produce."

Interested farmers should contact Perry at Reading Terminal Farmers' Market Trust, 1411 Walnut Street, Suite 200, Philadelphia, PA 19102, (215) 928-1029.

Project groups such as the Regional Infrastructure For Sustainable Agriculture (RISA), a partnership which includes Penn State University, the Rodale Institute, and the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, are working to help farmers market their produce, according to Jonda L. Crosby, RISA project associate.

RISA sponsored the January meeting with farmers and the Reading Terminal.

RISA examines "what is happening at the farm level and its effects on food distribution in the

region," said Crosby. "Southeast Pennsylvania is one of the most productive agricultural areas in the world and is among the most threatened from urban pressures in the U.S."

RISA involves 10 counties in the southeastern portion of the state. Through meetings, surveys, and other projects, RISA is trying "building a unified platform of issues that affect agriculture," said Crosby. After the assessment phase is completed in the late summer this year, grant resources will be allocated to address the barriers to sustaining agriculture, she indicated.

According to Rochelle Kelvin, RISA Metro Farmer Networks Project leader, the group is analyzing the needs of farmers through three separate surveys and focus groups. The results will be available sometime in the early summer, according to Kelvin.

One survey, titled "Consumer Perceptions And Attitudes About Regional Agriculture In Southeast Pennsylvania," interviewed 1,214 consumers in a wide variety of supermarkets and farmers' markets in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Another survey, sent to more than 1,500 farmers, asked questions regarding agricultural practices, trends, and barriers to long-term farming for dairy and vegetable farmers in the region. Another

smaller survey went to about 35 organic farmers in the region, asking questions about the marketing needs of these growers.

At a recent meeting, there was interest by farmers in marketing directly at a farmers' market that is taking shape in Norristown. At this

time, about 12-15 farmers are committed.

For more information about RISA, contact Crosby at the Berks County Cooperative Extension, P.O. Box 520, Leesport, PA 19533-0520, (610) 378-1135.

Scientists Study Effects Of Mastitis On Reproduction

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Mastitis, the dairy industry's most pervasive animal health problem, may be costing farmers more than they think. Each year, farmers lose up to \$200 per cow each year in lost milk, culled cows, veterinary fees and other expenses. Annual losses from mastitis total \$150 million in Pennsylvania and \$2 billion in North America.

Now researchers in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences are learning that mastitis also may be a factor in bovine embryo mortality. Veterinary scientists Dale Moore and William Sicho are investigating a possible link between coliform mastitis and changes in the reproductive cycle of infected cows.

"Some types of mastitis are caused by E. coli bacteria or other organisms that have endotoxins in their cell walls," Moore said. "When those bacteria die inside the mammary gland, toxins are released. The cow's immune system responds and, after a series of biochemical events, prostaglandin is produced. This chemical mediator is associated not only with pain but also with reproduction."

Moore suspects that prostaglandin released in response to mastitis short-circuits a cow's reproductive cycle. "A layer of tissue

called the corpus luteum, which grows on the ovary after a cow ovulates, may be the key," Moore said. "If the cow conceives, the corpus luteum produces progesterone, which maintains pregnancy."

Progesterone is produced at maximum levels during days six through 17 of the cow's 21-day cycle. "Normally, if conception doesn't occur, the cow's endometrium produces natural prostaglandin, dissolving the corpus luteum so that she can ovulate again," Moore said. "If bacterial endotoxin from mastitis stimulates her immune system and prostaglandin is produced, the corpus luteum could be dissolved. Once that happens, the pregnancy is over."

The researchers have studied 75 cows from Penn State's dairy herd since the project began. "We're not inducing mastitis in any animals, but if a cow is diagnosed with coliform mastitis, we study her," Moore said.

"Because hormone levels reveal whether the reproductive cycle is disrupted, we monitor blood progesterone every four days for a whole cycle. We also check the ovaries to see if a corpus luteum is present when mastitis is diagnosed, and whether it regresses as the infection runs its course."



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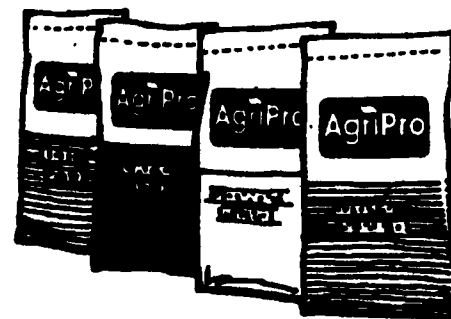
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