



OPINION

Meat Industry Responds To Consumer Needs

The U.S. meat industry is at a significant crossroads, where meat safety and quality coalesce as top priorities for the industry. The industry's recognition in the late '80s and the '90s of the growing evidence linking good health to smart nutrition brought leaner, trimmer meats to the meat counters. New packaging and the introduction of ready-to-eat meat dinners and products provided consumers with the convenience and quality they demanded. At the same time, concerns about emerging pathogenic bacteria, particularly a virulent strain of *Escherichia coli* (or *E. coli* O157:H7), and an outdated inspection program directed industry's attention to further improve the safety of its products.

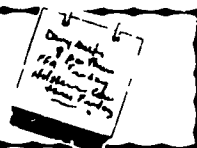
According to the executive summary of the National Meat Board's Blue Ribbon Task Force the crossroads facing the meat industry mirrors that of the government, as it moves to bring better science and safety control measures to the federal meat inspection program. The entire industry has committed to studying and developing measures that will reduce the introduction and growth of harmful pathogens that may be found in meat. New programs, techniques, and products designed to improve meat safety have been studied by companies, government agencies, and university researchers. Much data has been collected that provides profiles of meat and meat cuts and offers a glimpse of microbiological trends in the industry.

While the overall goal is to always provide the safest, cleanest, and most wholesome meat possible to consumers, the industry recognizes that meat surfaces — like poultry, seafood, and fresh produce — contain naturally occurring bacteria, some of which can be harmful if not properly controlled. By taking stringent measures to prevent and control pathogenic bacteria from the farm through the meat plant and to the retail establishment and the consumer's home, the industry can make available the safest product possible.

Significant changes in consumer food buying and purchasing trends have also resulted in new food safety challenges. Consumers rely heavily on convenient, ready-to-eat meat products that require little preparation. They spend more of their food dollars at restaurants than ever before. They expect a safe, nearly risk-free product. At the same time, fewer consumers know proper handling and cooking requirements for meats. Most bacteria are destroyed by proper cooking. While educating consumers about their role in preventing food-borne illness will continue to be a priority, the meat industry understands that it is its responsibility to market safe products.

New technologies such as irradiation pasteurization, carcass antibacterial rinses, and sprays, and rapid microbial tests offer exciting possibilities for identifying, controlling, and possibly eliminating bacteria that could cause food-borne illness. The Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HAACP) system of food production is a common-sense approach to monitoring and verifying that the food production system is working and producing the safest food possible. These and other new techniques and processes will result in improved public health protection.

Farm Calendar



Saturday, August 27

- Keystone Swiss Classic Brown Swiss Sale, Lebanon Fairgrounds, 11 a.m.
- Maryland State Fair, Timonium, thru Sept. 15.
- West Virginia State Holstein Sale, Marshall County Fairgrounds, Moundsville, W.Va.
- Susquehanna County 4-H Livestock Sale, Harford Fairgrounds, 1 p.m.
- Multicounty Livestock Tour, Northumberland County, starts at Max Dehart Farm, 1:30 p.m.

Sunday, August 28

- Rural Registration Conference, Nebraska City, Neb., through Aug. 30.
- Indiana County Fair, Indiana, thru Sept. 3.

Monday, August 29

- West End Fair, Gilbert, thru Sept. 4.

Dairy Day at the New York State Fair, Syracuse, fair runs thru Sept. 5.

Tuesday, August 30

- Wattsburg/Erie County Fair, Wattsburg, thru Sept. 3.
- Allentown Fair, Allentown, thru Sept. 4.
- Big Knob Grange Fair, Rochester, thru Sept. 5.
- Greene-Dreher Sterling Fair, (Turn to Page A31)

Farm Forum

Editor,

What happened to the first farm forum? I haven't heard anymore about it. The last I read they were going to make professionals out of the PA farmers. That's good, but may I make a suggestion, set up a committee of honest, hard work-



Now Is The Time

By John Schwartz

Lancaster County Agricultural Agent

To Account For Seeding Variation

According to a University of Wisconsin study, the same seeder setting on a planter gave a large variation in the amount of seed used per acre in an alfalfa seeding trail.

The amount of seed used per acre in the study varied from a low of 13.8 pounds per acre to a high of 20.8 pounds per acre.

Several factors contributed to the difference in the study. First was the size of the seed. A second factor was whether the seed was coated or not. A third factor was the number of seeds per pound of seed.

It is a general rule of thumb that a pound of alfalfa seed contains 220,000 seeds. In the Wisconsin study that number varied from a low of 196,000 to a high of 224,000 seeds per pound of seed.

Dr. Marvin Hall, Penn State Agronomist, considers 75 to 90 alfalfa seeds per square foot to be an ideal seeding. In the Wisconsin study, rates varied from a low of 70 seeds to a high of 105 seeds per square.

Calibrate your seeders now to insure you receive the stand and productivity you want.

To Calibrate Seeders

Before seeding any forages or small grain crops this fall, calibration of the seeder may save you money, according to Robert Anderson, extension agronomy agent.

Knowing the ideal seeding rate for a crop is only half the battle. Knowing how much seed is being applied by the seeder is another important step in getting the optimum number of plants growing per acre.

A study in Wisconsin found that most farmers knew how much seed was suggested per acre, but few knew exactly how much was being applied until the job was done. Then they compared the amount of seed used and the acres planted.

Seed calibration is fairly easy and may help to insure a proper seeding rate. Each time a variety of seed is changed, Dr. Marvin Hall, Penn State Agronomist, suggests recalibration of the seeder using the following method.

Spread a tarp on the ground and

run the seeder over it. Then select several sites on the tarp and count the number of seeds in a one square foot area. If you count between 75 and 90 seeds in each square foot area, you are seeding at an ideal rate for alfalfa.

To Analyze Production Data

When was the last time you sat down and analyze production data from your farm?

Farmers receive a lot of production information from settlement sheets or with check payments. You need to ask yourself, where do I stand or rank with my fellow producers? Are you in the top 10 percent? The bottom third or in the middle?

If you are not in the top 10 percent, you need to start analyzing why and take steps to become a top 10 percent producer.

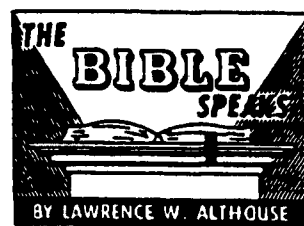
Agriculture is still a very highly competitive industry. As a result,

you have many farmers constantly looking for better, more efficient and profitable ways to produce. This means change is always with us. As a result, farmers need to be constantly studying, participating in educational meetings and incorporating and managing change in their operation.

So the next time you receive your milk check or contract settlement, calculate your various production efficiencies and compare to an industry or company database. Find out where you rank. If your company or cooperative does not have a company database on its farmers, you may want to encourage them to develop one.

With today's computer technology it would be easy to generate a database that will help identify your farm's strengths and weaknesses.

Feather Prof's Footnote: "Losers let it happen, Winners make it happen."



WHAT'S ON THE MENU?
August 28, 1994

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Background Scripture:
Deuteronomy 28
Devotional Reading:
Deuteronomy 29: 10-18a

There are some valuable lessons in Deuteronomy 28, but be forewarned: it is a pre-Christian document and its picture of God is substantially different from the one presented in the New Testament.

I shouldn't bother to make that observation were it not for the tendency of some Christians to lift from the Old Testament teachings and ideas that are incompatible with Christian understanding. This is not to denigrate Deuteronomy, but to put it in perspective — as Jesus did.

The basic idea of this chapter is that obeying God's commandments brings blessings and disobeying brings curses. "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you obey the voice of the Lord your God" (28:2). "But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you" (28:15).

IN PERSPECTIVE

Generally, this is true: obeying God usually brings blessings while disobeying him usually brings troubles. This is the motivation to which Moses appealed: it will pay to do good and it will cost you to disobey God. But we have to understand that in this chapter Moses is speaking poetically instead of as a systematic thinker. He is overstating his case and that is all right as long as you know that and keep it in mind.

If you try to make a legalistic principle out of it, however, it will not work, because all of us have been around long enough to know that doing right sometimes brings sorrow — the crucifixion of Jesus — and doing wrong is sometimes rewarded, at least in the short run.

Note that all of the blessings and curses are primarily material

in nature: "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock" (28:4). "Cursed . . . shall you be in the field. Cursed shall you be in your basket and your kneading trough. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground . . ." (28:18). There is nothing said about spiritual blessings and curses. That was a perspective still to come.

A GREATER LONG RUN

Why? Because they had no official belief in life after death and there was no hereafter. And because there was no hereafter the only way a person could be rewarded or punished was in the here and now with material well-being. With the advent of a belief in a life after death there was provided a greater "long run" in which to receive either blessings or curses and in a spiritual rather than material realm.

Another point of contrast is in the depiction of God and His reaction to the consequences of human sin: "And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you" (28:63). The God of the New Testament (as well as the God depicted by other writers of the Old Testament: Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) is not one who would "delight" in destroying his disobedient children.

Nevertheless, this chapter is relevant for us today in that it teaches us that our well-being is dependent upon the choices we make — and to realize that those choices have consequences, quite apart from the issue of God's forgiveness. For example: if we take someone's life and then seek God's forgiveness, it will not bring that person back to life. Forgiveness usually does not change consequences in the short-run, only the long-run.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "Everybody soon or late sits down to a banquet of consequences." Just remember, what's on the menu is what you put there.

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