

National County Agent Association Honors Hughes

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— Lancaster livestock agent Chet Hughes first met his objectives when he noticed the kind of response he received from a two-day workshop in July 1993.

Cattle feeders across the county were so impressed with the information provided about understanding beef cattle grading and quality assurance at the workshop that they wanted more.

So Hughes, again, helped set up another workshop during the same time this year.

Hughes' work on showing cattle feeders how to evaluate cattle for market, including live and carcass trait evaluation, so impressed the judges at the annual meeting of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents that they honored him in September with the Search for Excellence recognition in Casper, Wyo.

The award was presented, according to Hughes, for his efforts in working with the cattle feeders in this area on producing safe, low-fat animal products.

Lancaster County is home to as many as 100,000 head of fed cattle, which makes up a large portion of meat products on the eastern seaboard, according to Hughes. (There are no statistics available from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture on how many cattle

are raised for beef in the county.)

The goals of the program, which was authored by Dr. Bill Henning, Penn State extension red meats specialist, were to have cattle feeders understand quality and yield grading, particularly the USDA grading systems, and how they work. The other goal was to get producers concerned about quality assurance, including understanding of materials used in caring for cattle.

"Producers see the cattle graded live at the market, but they don't often get to see them hanging on the rail and what they look like and how they're graded in carcass form," said Hughes. Many who grade the cattle, like the judge in the show ring, have to make estimates on finish and approximate percentage of the body in actual red meat. "People find out that it's not real accurate when you're sitting there eyeballing the cattle and making that decision," Hughes said.

Only when the animal is hung up on the rail do you get the real information about percentage of fat, marbling, and size of loin eye.

Also, the workshops helped the producer understand why certain animals are sold as "Choice Yield Grade 3 or Choice Yield Grade 1 or Select Yield Grade 3," or whatever, according to the extension agent. Hughes writes a monthly column in *Lancaster Farming*,



Chet Hughes, Lancaster County livestock agent, was recently honored with the Search for Excellence Award from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in Casper, Wyo. The award was presented for his efforts with the cattle feeders in the county on producing safe, low-fat animal products. Photo by Andy Andrews

called Livestock Ledger, of which he reported the findings of the July 1993 meeting.

The workshop in 1993 focused on grading. The 1994 workshop focused on late feeding of cattle, using a 1,600-pound steer to illustrate how much fat is on an animal that is overly finished.

"It's an eye-opening experience

for anybody who's never been through it, even people that buy cattle every day," said Hughes.

The success of the workshops have been evident. This year, Hughes said the intention is to combine the workshop with a field day at a Lancaster County finishing farm, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association.

"The first one went over so well, the people really appreciated the fact that we took the time and effort to put that together," he said. "Cattle feeders felt it was very valuable to them."

One of the concerns Hughes has is about the lack of uniformity of the product in the beef industry, and that will be the focus of upcoming workshops. More will be presented on how cattle feeders can understand and make use of

expected progeny difference (EPD) information when selecting cattle.

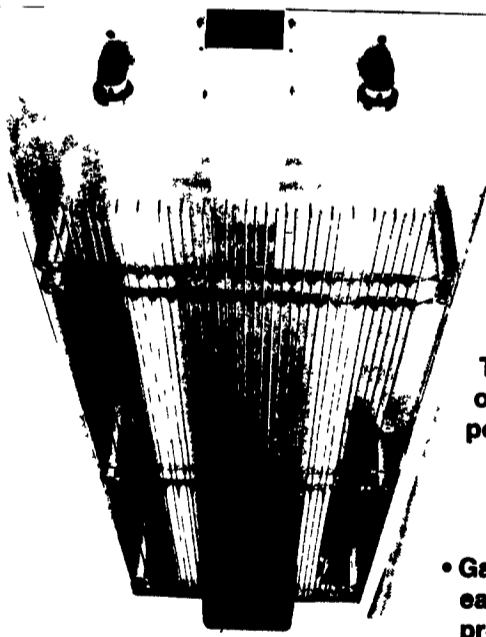
There is an effort to get the cow/calf producers involved that finish beef, because of the ways they can select EPDs for more marbling, bigger ribeye, or less fat. "We're starting to identify carcass traits and, by using those bulls, we should be able to, in time, produce a more uniform product."

Hughes said, "That's the beauty of EPDs — you now have more predictability. You can select a high marbling bull and use it in the herd. I'm not sure if our producers have latched onto that yet."

"It can be done. But it's going to be a while until the whole industry gets to that point."

"Every little thing producers can do to fine-tune their operation is helpful," he said.

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