

Beef Industry Representatives Discuss Safety Concerns

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.
Lancaster Farming Staff
LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — America has the safest and most abundant food supply in the world.

It's a statement often repeated, though apparently many American consumers — arguably very unaware of the real-world conditions the average human being faces, concerning food safety and availability — don't seem to believe it.

Nevertheless, that statement is the pride-cry of the meat industry and it was the preface to comments made Tuesday during a panel discussion of the USDA's administration of its "Zero Tolerance" rule, held as part of the annual Lancaster County Cattle Feeder's Day, at the Farm and Home Center, in Lancaster.

County Livestock Agent Chester Hughes put together the panel which was moderated by Dr. Bill Henning, a Penn State University

meat specialist, in its Department of Dairy and Animal Science.

On the panel were Billy Lloyd, representing the National Cattlemen's Association, based on Englewood, Colo.; K.T. Miller, public relations director for meat processor Monfort Inc., a subsidiary of Conagra Red Meat Companies; Walter Olsted, who is a staff officer of the USDA Food, Safety and Inspection Service; and Myron Stoltzfus, of Stoltzfus Meats Inc., a family butchering and meat processing business in Intercourse.

Henning began the discussion by stating several facts about the meat industry and the related health concerns that have come to public attention, more so in recent years.

An incident in 1993 in which several people died from eating improperly cooked hamburger that was contaminated with a deadly, rare form of E. coli caused a lot of finger pointing within the industry and resulted in the adoption of a

policy for slaughter houses of zero-tolerance for contamination of meat carcasses by common E. coli-bearing materials, such as fecal material, or other material from the digestive tract.

As imposed, federal inspectors on line at slaughter houses have the obligation to stop production lines if they observe carcasses with specs of possible fecal material, and then have a worker trim the offending-looking material, along with meat from the carcass.

Those representing the meat processing industry complained not so much about the waste of the process, but the fact that it slowed down lines, resulting in carcasses being exposed for longer periods of time to temperatures and condi-

tions that could spread the growth of bacteria.

They also complained that the zero-tolerance regulation was not based on any type of scientific (logical) reasoning. The visual identification of material on a carcass as possibly coming from the animal's digestive tract has no bearing on whether it constitutes a contamination of the carcass by E. coli bacteria.

The industry representatives were in consensus that what is needed are testing procedures for bacteria which are fast, effective and reliable; a science-based system of slaughtering and carcass chilling that stresses the final state and condition of a processed carcass; more research and political support for sound science; and an insistence that end-product users be held responsible for their actions (90 percent of foodborne illness has been traceable to food service industry mishandling, and about 10 percent to household mishandling).

According to Henning, from the time a domestic meat animal leaves the farm, the only way to ensure the food safe from possible contamination of E. coli is to cook the meat properly, to a temperature of at least 155 degrees.

Olsted, gave a perspective of the USDA under the regime which implemented the "zero-tolerance" rule.

According to Olsted, for the first time since the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service inception in 1906, there is a lawyer administering the program, Mike Taylor, formerly with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

According to Olsted, Taylor has realigned some of the power at the top of the organization and has brought in a physician to head a new agency to advise him on food borne illnesses.

Also, former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy created the position of undersecretary of food safety, so now the administrator of the FSIS has more power, he said.

The group of panelists also discussed the implementation of HACCP, which is a program Taylor brought to the department. HACCP is an acronym for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points.

HACCP is a method of examining a system and locating its weak points, and then focusing on those weak points. It can be used with any type of industry. It could even be implemented

on a family farm to increase worker safety, or to stave off mastitis in a dairy herd.

Ironically, at the same time on Tuesday that the panelists were telling the 200 or more attendees to the program about HACCP, it was being published in the Federal Register as proposed regulations.

According to a Wednesday article published in the Wall Street Journal, acting Agriculture Secretary Richard Rominger said, "We are proposing to reinvent the meat and poultry inspection system, which is currently based primarily on sight, touch and smell."

The proposal is to be published in final form after four months of review by the public, according to the report.

Perhaps the most striking comments from board members were those made by Myron Stoltzfus, who related in a prepared statement conditions of working with the regulations coming from the USDA, the voluminous details, constant revisions, extra and additional associated costs, some of the prima donna behavior of some federal inspectors, and the frustration of trying to maintain a small business in the face of ridiculous, politically or bureaucratically motivated regulations.

In his opening statement, Stoltzfus said the USDA should be aware that, especially in relation to the zero-tolerance requirements, the "... tolerance level of small business is about zero."

Stoltzfus, who repeated the statement that America has the safest food supply in the world, and in history, said it was a challenge to understand the actions of the federal government.

He said he read statements from people in Washington saying that the regulations can't wait for science to catch up.

That doesn't make any sense, he said, in light of the fact that one of the leading experts on E. coli bacteria has suggested that perhaps the reason that the rare deadly form of E. coli formed was as a result of the almost necrotically bacteria-free meat that the American system attempts to demand.

According to Stoltzfus, the researcher has suggested that perhaps the best way to ensure that deadly forms of E. coli (normally a common harmless bacteria found almost everywhere) do not culture in food, is to allow the harmless bacteria to take hold.

Maryland Meetings

FREDERICK, Md. — Two different Maryland farm programs are scheduled for Feb. 7 and Feb. 8 at the Walkersville Fire Hall.

On Feb. 7, the annual Frederick County Winter Meeting is scheduled with registration and a trade show to start at 8:30 a.m., and the formal program to start at 10 a.m. Registration is \$3.

On the program are topics of weed control, intensive grazing, pasture management, government programs, organic by-product fertilizers, and alternative agriculture options.

A large part of the winter meeting is the interactive trade show — it takes up more than half of the huge fire hall. The show contains a wide range of agribusinesses and related industries, in addition to educational displays by different agencies.

On Feb. 8 at the fire hall, the Frederick County "Dairying Today Program," is to be held.

Registration starts at 8:30 a.m., and the formal program begins at 9:30 a.m.

Sponsored jointly by the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service and the agricultural business community, registration is \$3 at the door.

This program will also feature a trade show. The formal educational program is to include keynote speaker Dr. Bob Milligan, an agricultural economist with Cornell University, show specializes in farm and other small business management.

Other topics include raising dairy replacements, and raising corn specifically for silage.

For more information on either program, call (301) 694-1594.



GOLDEN LEAF TOBACCO CO. INC.



ATTENTION TOBACCO FARMERS

We are no longer receiving tobacco at our Kirkwood Receiving Station. We thank all farmers for support in our first year on the Southern end of the county.

Bareville will continue receiving tobacco 8-4, every Mon through Fri. at our location 1/4 mile east of Rt. 23 on Graybill Rd., next to Harry's Auction in the village of Bareville, Pa. (the old scales factory) until **Feb. 15, 1995**. Any farmers interested in processing their tobacco should contact the Bareville office.
717-354-8177 717-656-8452

Consider Golden Leaf Tobacco Co. when marketing your 609 or 41 type tobacco. A company with an outstanding reputation for supporting Lancaster tobacco farmers year after year.

Golden Leaf Tobacco Co.
Mac Bailey (717) 354-8177

Clark Stauffer (717) 733-8921 (717) 575-0622 (717) 738-2328	Dennis Hess (717) 627-4075	Michael Bailey (717) 529-2886 (717) 572-2575	Aaron Miller Ans. Serv. (717) 656-6109
--	-------------------------------	--	--


We Welcome You Back to Our
ANNUAL MULE AUCTION
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1995

Starting at 11:00 a.m. at the Lancaster Silo Farm
Location: 2008 Horseshoe Road Lane, Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17601
Take Route 30 south to Route 340, east 1/2 mile, at light take Horseshoe Road left, go 1/2 mile and watch for sign at end of driveway, right.

THE SALE WILL BE HELD INSIDE-CONSIGNMENTS RECEIVED STARTING AT 12 NOON ON FRIDAY. WE EXPECT APPROXIMATELY 100 HEAD OF BIG DRAFT MULES FROM 16 TO 18 HANDS. WE WORKED A LOT OF THESE MULES ON THE FARMS LAST SUMMER

EARLY CONSIGNERS INCLUDE:

• Kemp & Reese, TN	• 4 PR young, 17H, Broke • Gary Estis, IN
• John Kelso, TN	• 3 PR tall fancy sorrels, 17H • Roy Epperson, NC
• Jack Strood, TN	• 2 PR Big heavy mules, worked in log woods, 16.3H, out of MI
• 3 PR fancy, young, 16.2 - 17H, Broke on his farm • Mervin Hoover, KY	



The 20 mule team we plan to hitch on February 10th.

Sale mules will be hitched on Friday before the sale. If you are looking for a team of "broke mules" here is the place to come.

Commission: 5% No sale charge: \$20 per head
There will be no commission on the top selling pair of mules.

AUCTION BY DIFFENBACH'S AUCTION 225L 393-4464

Paul S. Smucker

2008 Horseshoe Road, Lancaster, PA 17601
Phone (717) 299-3721

For Financing Call 291-1855
Call before sale date. Ask for Bill

"There will be a 15% discount on all Lancaster Silo Parts and machinery. Also on silo orders."



From the left, USDA and beef cattle industry representatives sit on a panel to discuss the zero-tolerance regulation and upcoming changes for the industry. From the left is Walter Olsted, Billy Lloyd, K.T. Miller, Myron Stoltzfus, and Dr. Bill Henning, moderator.