

Learn About What Food Pa. Produces At Event

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Pennsylvania has the largest food processing industry in the Northeast and ranks among the top five in the nation. You can learn more about the nation's complex food system at Penn State's Ag Progress Days, Aug. 13-15.

The College of Agricultural Sciences Exhibits Building, on West 11th Street at the Ag Progress Day site, will feature the many aspects of Pennsylvania's food system, from the farm gate to the table.

The state's main food products are baked goods, meats, sugar and

AG Progress Days

"Penn State AG Science..."

"We're More Than You Think"



confections, preserved fruits and vegetables, and dairy products. Pennsylvania has more bakeries than any other state and ranks first in pretzels, potato chips, chocolate, and other confections," said Donald Thompson, associate professor and head of food science at the college. "We rank second in egg processing, ice cream and yogurt, processed meats and pet food."

Pennsylvania also leads the nation in mushroom production and is among the top 10 in production of milk, cheese, red meat, poultry, grapes, peaches, apples, cherries, pears, tomatoes, snap beans, and sweet corn.

The economics of the state's

food system will be featured in a display showing creation of jobs, the state's proximity to large marketing areas and other aspects of the industry. "Pennsylvania has more than 2,300 food companies, ranging from small businesses to large corporations," said Thompson. "Food-processing has an enormous economic impact in our state."

Pennsylvania's food processing companies employ more than 90,000 workers and create opportunities for warehouses, transportation firms, and other businesses. According to a 1992 Penn State study of 20 leading industries in the commonwealth, food processing accounts for nearly 9 percent

of all manufacturing jobs and ranks third in the creation of new jobs.

A display titled "Who is the Middle Man?" will show who some of these workers are and explain how food-processing companies meet customer demand by adding value to fresh produce. "The 'Middle Man' actually is a lot of people, including processors, packagers, employees in transportation and storage companies, and grocery store workers," said Dr. James Dunn, professor of agricultural economics. "Each contributes to the value of food products and each receives a portion of our food dollar."

Also featured will be alternative ways that families can obtain food. "Getting a healthful variety of nutritious foods can be difficult for resource-stressed households," said Dr. Madeleine Sigman-Grant, associate professor of food science. "Our exhibit will show some of the ways that families can get nutritious meals, such as food assistance programs and school breakfasts and lunches.

"One very successful effort in our state is the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market program, which supplies WIC clients with coupons they can use to buy fresh produce," said Sigman-Grant. "This also has led to the opening of more farmers' markets, giving farmers another outlet for selling fresh produce."

Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences has collaborated with agencies across Pennsylvania to establish programs to raise the public's awareness of the food system. Some of these programs will be on display, including Food to Grow, a Pittsburgh-based effort to get organizations and individuals committed to eliminating hunger and poor nutrition; York and Cumberland counties' summer food-systems camps, which teach youth how food is grown, processed and distributed; and various activities in southeast Pennsylvania associated with the Regional Infrastructure for Sustaining Agriculture.

"Safe, high-quality food is often taken for granted," said Dr. Audrey Maretzki, professor of food science and nutrition. "Everyone depends on the food system, but very few people understand how it works or how we can influence it with our purchases, our support for certain businesses and laws, and our participation in policy discussions about food issues."

Visitors can also learn about KEYSTONE 21 — The Pennsylvania Food Systems Professions Education Program, supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The program is a partnership among Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences and Commonwealth Educational System, the Rodale Institute, and Cheyney University. Directed by Dr. Theodore Alter, interim dean of the college, it is aimed at preparing food system professionals to be responsive to the dynamic and complex food issues of the 21st century.

In addition, visitors can take a self-guided interactive tour that illustrates how a raw commodity, such as a potato, can be harvested, processed and made into a finished product, such as a potato chip. Another display shows how economic value is added to a commodity from the time the crop is planted to the moment a consumer picks up a fresh loaf of bread on a supermarket shelf.

Penn State's Ag Progress Days feature more than 500 acres of educational and commercial exhibits, tours and machinery demonstrations. It is held at the Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center at Rock Springs.



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