

Penn State Researches Perceptions Of Animal Agriculture

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — How do young people learn about agriculture, and where do they get the information? Is it based on science? Or is it from self-serving organizations? To find the answers, Penn State researchers are studying public perceptions of farm animal production methods.

"The information children receive will influence their opinions for the rest of their lives," says Dr. Lowell L. Wilson, professor of animal science. "To make sure children have a balanced view of the use of animals, we need to determine what they know and how they get their information."

Students and their teachers are being surveyed about animal agriculture, animal agriculture by-products, food safety, animal well-being, how animal agriculture affects the environment, and what farmers do to protect the environment for future generations.

Students in grades 6-8 are asked questions such as "Do you know which farm animals these products come from?" and "How did you learn about farm animals?" They also are asked to rank the importance of topics such as safety of the food supply, disposal of animal wastes, use of chemicals on food, how farm animals are treated, and how animals are treated in research. Students in grades 11-12 are asked similar but more detailed questions about topics such as pesticide residues, water contamination, growth hormones and antibiotic residues in food.

Preliminary results indicate teachers are students' primary source of information about agriculture. "This emphasizes the need to determine what teachers know about animal agriculture and where they obtain their information," Wilson notes. "Most

teachers do not have direct experience with agriculture. They rely on information provided to them, which may come from activist organizations. Teachers need access to factual, science-based information to give their students a balanced view."

The primary concern of students and teachers in all grade levels surveyed was the safety of the food supply. "This may reflect recent publicity about contaminated unpasteurized apple juice and undercooked hamburger causing illness and death," Wilson notes. "These incidents reveal the power of public perception. Public education has been shown to be the best tool against unfounded negative public perceptions."

All groups also were concerned about animal well-being. "Farm animals are treated differently than companion animals, such as cats or dogs," Wilson says. "Without sufficient understanding of the reasons for farm animal procedures, the general public may view some practices as cruel and unnecessary."

As part of this project, Penn State researchers developed a best management practices manual, which explains practices such as tail docking, beak clipping, enclosed housing, individual stalls and antibiotic use. Other materials, which address issues such as food safety, animal welfare, and farm safety, were developed by members of the Penn State student club Students for the Responsible Use of Animals and are made available at events such as Ag Progress Days and the Pennsylvania Farm Show. These materials also are distributed to Penn State Cooperative Extension county offices and other educational groups.

Farmers in Lancaster County also are being surveyed to determine how they think they are perceived by the public and to give

them an opportunity to assess their industry and its methods.

"We chose Lancaster County because it has a growing urban population in a traditionally rural farming area," explains Patricia A. Nordstrom, project assistant. "We asked farmers if they had received any complaints about their operation and the nature of the complaints. They also were asked to rank the concern level of how they believe the public feels about issues such as agricultural chemicals, food cost, disposal of animal waste and farm animal welfare."

The researchers also surveyed 1,500 non-farm residents of Lancaster County. "We also wanted to identify concerns of these resi-

dents about area farms," Nordstrom says. "Farmers who are aware of how they are perceived by the general public will be better equipped to address the public's concerns."

Producers, students, teachers and members of the general public are encouraged to participate in this project by contacting Wilson at (814) 863-3659 or Patricia Nordstrom at (814) 863-6059.

Producers are also being asked to participate in a separate Penn State project about animal handling and transportation. "Money, time and effort can be lost if animals are improperly handled or transported, resulting in losses due

to stress, bruises, hide damage or injuries," Wilson says. "We're surveying producers about the industry's handling and transporting practices. Producers are asked to identify improvements they have made and where further improvements can be made."

These projects are supported by research funds administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Penn State appropriations. Other researchers participating in the project include Dr. Timothy W. Kelsey, assistant professor of agricultural economics; Dr. Audrey N. Maretzki, professor of food science; and Dr. Charles W. Pitts, professor of entomology.

Eckel Appointed To State Farmland Protection Board

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, Agriculture Secretary Charles C. Brosius announced the appointment of Keith Eckel to the Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Preservation Board at its regular meeting.

"Mr. Eckel's leadership in the agricultural community, familiarity with state government and his commitment to the preservation of our valuable farmland certainly make him a welcome asset to the board," said Brosius, who chairs the board.

Eckel is a full-time farmer in Clarks Summit, Lackawanna County. He served as president of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau from 1981 until April 1996. On April 4, 1996 he was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Insurance Enterprise.

In partnership with his brother, Doug, the Eckel farming operation consists of more than 1,400 acres of field crops and a successful green wrap tomato production and marketing operation.

In 1982, Eckel, his father and brother were awarded the coveted Pennsylvania Master Farmer award by Pennsylvania Farmer Magazine and the Pennsylvania State University.

Created in 1989, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Preservation Board is responsible for the oversight of the state Farmland Program. The program allows the state and counties to purchase development rights, referred to as easements, to guarantee that farms will remain as agricultural land.

The board approved today easement purchases of 12 farmers encompassing 1987 acres of prime farmland.

Following is a list of the 12 properties, including owner, township, acreage and purchase cost.

•Adams — Edward and Susan Sanders, Mt. Joy Township, 99 acres, \$103,874.

•Berks — Eugene L. and Darlene R. Moser, Oley Township, 63 acres, \$126,920.

•Chester — Omar and Ruth Beam, West Nantmeal Township, 203 acres, \$617,130.

•Chester — Kimberton Waldorf School, East Vincent Township, 165 acres, \$686,932.

•Lehigh — Mildred E. DeLong, Weisenberg Township, 133 acres, \$304,811.

•Lehigh — Marion P. Houck, Joan L. Drey, Diane F. Wilson and Carol A. Reimert, Weisenberg Township, 84 acres, \$184,710.

•Lehigh — Pauline Seidel, Lower and Upper Macungie townships, 98 acres, \$244,466.

•Perry — Roy C. Byers, Tuscarora Township, 369 acres, \$233,354.

•Wayne — Jack D. and Kathryn Downton, Starrucca Borough, 217 acres, \$151,900.

•Westmoreland — Richard O. and Sharon Love, East Huntingdon Township, 97 acres, \$174,221.

•York — Melvin M. and Helen E. Glatfelter, Lower Chanceford Township, 99 acres, \$131,580.

•York — Joseph and Ada May Koepper and J&J Associates, Inc., Lower Chanceford Township, 360 acres, \$445,500.

Including these easements, 728 farms in 37 counties will have joined the program or had easements approved, protecting 91,593 acres.



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