

1997 Ends As Perplexing Year For Producers

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Land O'Lakes), probably the biggest story of the year was the avian influenza (A.I.) outbreak which caused great concern for producers in the state.

In mid-May, a 75-square-mile quarantine zone was instituted at the request of the industry to control the outbreak of a nonpathogenic form of A.I. virus. In mid-June, Gov. Tom Ridge authorized the state Department of Agriculture to spend \$5 million to fight avian influenza.

At the end of July of 1997, it was announced by the state that the poultry shows were cancelled at this year's Farm Show.

Fortunately, relying on past experience, the outbreak was successfully controlled, and only 1,024 million birds were destroyed. Sixteen premises were affected, including two in Lebanon and 14 in Lancaster. The quarantine was officially lifted Nov. 10.

Yet, mirroring a seesaw, here today and gone-tomorrow type of year, on Dec. 17 it was announced that a 24,800-bird turkey flock in northern Lancaster County was

infected with the virus, and concerns once again resurfaced. But because of persistent efforts to maintain biosecurity, many producers weathered the storm and the poultry industry continues to revitalize itself in the state.

In this back-and-forth year of biotechnical applications in cloning, tobacco growing and harvest challenges, about the requested resignation of then-Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brosius of West Chester, there was the emerging success stories of farmland preservation, about the state Grange conducting a historic meeting in Reading, and other events that kept producers optimistic about the future of agriculture.

Political Changes

There were several major political events involving those representing Pennsylvania agriculture that were much talked about within the community, though perhaps didn't much impact the general public's opinion of the industry as a whole.

One happened in the spring. Gov. Tom Ridge requested the resignation of mushroom farmer

Charles Brosius of West Chester, then secretary of agriculture.

The move resulted in an outpouring of comment and widely expressed disappointment from all areas of agriculture. Brosius had endeared himself to the constituency and to the legislature.

Ridge explained that he wanted someone else to move the state Department of Agriculture in a new direction.

Not long after, former and retired Republican leader of the state House of Representatives, Samuel Hayes Jr., accepted the position as state secretary of agriculture. Hayes noted he wants to make the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture a "blue ribbon" agency.

The change in leadership presented some changes in function and operation. While Brosius continues to be widely admired for his diplomacy and bearing as secretary, Hayes has come on strongly as an advocate for expanding Pennsylvania's agricultural base, fostering creativity and effectiveness and providing leadership with more political savvy and international experience and understanding.

In late February last year, members of the Land O'Lakes Cooperative approved a plan to merge with the Atlantic Dairy Cooperative. The merger became effective April 1. In other merger news, PennAg and Pennsylvania Agronomic Products Association announced a merger in mid-June 1997.

The Pennsylvania State Grange celebrated its 125th anniversary during the year, passing a torch from one subordinate Grange to another across the state, Olympic-style, ending with the return of the torch to state Master William Steel during a historic pageant in Reading.

Early in October, Samuel Hayes Jr., state secretary of agriculture, signed and authorized the state's first official nutrient management plan on the 445-acre beef finishing operation, Greystone Manor Farms, located along Rt. 272. The event was significant because it marks the culmination of more than a decade of effort by many people to establish and implement a statewide nutrient management law.



Samuel Hayes Jr., Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture, at right, noted he wants to make the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture a "blue ribbon" agency. A meeting of the Pennsylvania Council of Farm Organizations was held early in June at which Hayes spoke. With him is Earl Fink, president of the Council.

Greystone Manor Farms, in mid-September, preserved prime farmland at the Lancaster Farmland Trust's annual picnic, held at the farm.

The Pennsylvania Farm Bureau held a news conference mid-April at the dairy farm of Ronald Kopp in Middletown. The conference was called to promote legislation to place at least a five-cent deposit on bottles and cans in the state.

A three-part bottle bill series in *Lancaster Farming* examined the challenges farmers face from the bottles dumped on their property, the damages the trash causes, and ways in which states such as Oregon successfully enacted bottle bill legislation.

Technological Breakthroughs

The general population became aware of some of the biotechnical applications occurring in agriculture and the pharmaceutical industries. In a historic event, a lamb was cloned directly from its parent.

Cloning has almost become an everyday subject in agriculture. But the news about the lamb was significant because it showed the actual application of the theory of using adult genetic material to clone genetically identical offspring.

The announcement of the clone (it took many attempts to achieve it) began a somewhat short-lived international debate about the use of the technology.

Soybean producers began making use of major herbicide-resistant varieties. Applications for genetic control, rather than chemical control, of plant pests were coming to fruition.

The entire industry is switching gradually to genetically strong strains of plants that can protect themselves from insect pressure, disease, and drought — almost, in a sense, "evolving" away from the use of strictly chemical controls.

Also, the Food and Drug Administration early in December approved irradiation of meat products for controlling disease-causing microorganisms. The approval applies to fresh and frozen red meats such as beef, lamb, and pork, and joins ranks with previously approved vegetables and fruits.

One FDA commissioner noted that irradiation of meat could provide consumers with another tool to control food-borne disease.

Precision agricultural tools were demonstrated at the annual Ag Progress Days in Rockspring. More crop growers are using satellite record-keeping to track elements of their crops to improve pesticide and fertilizer use.

Also, the swine industry is making huge strides toward the use of artificial insemination (AI) on their herds. It won't be long before a half of all breeders use AI exclusively.

Farmland Preservation

In October, on a 1,350-acre family farm in Nazareth, on the farm of the Willard Setzer family, the state government and ag leadership recognized the milestone of breaking the 100,000th acre mark in farmland preservation.

In addition, Gov. Tom Ridge signed an executive order that calls for continued cooperation between state and local agencies to protect farmland through the state's farmland preservation program, which secures development rights on that property.

Ridge noted that his order is to direct state agencies to actively seek ways to preserve the state's prime agricultural land, rather than to take a passive role.

The Setzer location was chosen because, when the family sold the development rights on a 273-acre tract of the farm for Northampton county for \$1.09 million, the

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Several press conferences were scheduled during the year to disseminate information about the spread of a non-pathogenic form of avian influenza virus. This one in May was held to announce to new flocks identified with the virus in the quarantine zone in northern Lancaster County. From left, John Martin, chair of the Poultry Health Committee of the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation; John Hoffman, executive director of the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation; Walter N. Peechatka, executive deputy agriculture secretary; and Dr. Sherbyn Ostrich, acting director of the bureau of animal health and diagnostic services and state veterinarian. As a result of the outbreak, the Northeast Poultry Show was cancelled, in addition to poultry shows at the state Farm Show.



Farmland preservation programs in Lancaster County and throughout the state recorded a "banner" year. At the Trust's annual picnic held at Greystone Manor Farms in mid-September are, standing from left to right, Karen M. Wells, director of land preservation for the Trust; Melissa Cauler, Trust development assistant; and Pip Ravegum, farm manager.