

Farmers Union Conducts

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chairs John Allen, Saxonburgh; Don Gardner, Amity; and Sam Hunt, Uniontown.

In April the group projected the slaughter of the first animals by the end of September and a test marketing phase in October and November. With this time line on track, the final report, projected for February 1, 1999 should come in on schedule. Development for the project has involved a series of organizing meetings over the last year and the services of a panel of seven experts, brought together by Robert Junk, president of the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, Harrisburg.

Others providing help for organizing include Therese Tuttle, an attorney with the National Farmers Union, who is providing legal advice and organizational expertise; Shawn Moore, a meat marketing specialist from the University of Wyoming; Don Fretts, Fayette County extension agent; Gary Greg, 84 Packing company; Jim Willis, Green County Beef Producer; Tom Elliott, owner and operator of the N-Bar Ranch, Montana and Allen Matthews, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture.

Marketing The Beef

This study has identified areas where production farmers need to increase their involvement with the product. One specific idea that will be investigated as the study progresses includes direct feedback from the consumer. As part of the marketing test in three "upscale" restaurants, customers were asked to fill out a 12-question survey on their dining experience. This feedback will be used by the restaurant owner, the steering committee and the producer to adjust the product to meet the customers needs. According to Tom Elliot, surveys, including the "1995 National Beef Quality Audit" show that there is a shortfall in the production of premium beef. He noted that there is a market for 7% prime beef, but only 1% of production grades prime. And a market for 21% upper 2/3 choice, but only 11% is produced. The marketing test will attempt to take advantage of those needs and build a sustainable future for marketing beef.

Part of the marketing effort includes presenting the beef as a branded product called Keystone Certified Beef. Table placards in the restaurant note that "Certified Keystone Beef" is available, and the restaurant uses the words "Certified Keystone Beef" on the

menu. To be certified, producers must meet the coop standards, both in the production cycle and grading on the rail.

Other products may join the fresh beef in the restaurant line; including a pot roast meal and a beet stew. These products are also in the testing stage, and a prototype of the pot roast was unveiled at the news conference. This beef is pre-cooked and packed for the busy family who want to eat a healthy meal. Behavioral surveys have found that busy families facing meal choices budget less than an hour a day for food preparation. Half the time, these people will decide on a menu after 4:30 in the evening. From slaughter to cooking and packaging, the processing for these products is being done by Eight Four Packing Company, Eighty Four, PA.

Feedback For The Producer

One basic principle this study group has identified is that the producer must grow what the consumer is willing to buy. This group has taken steps to strengthen one of the weak links in determining what has been produced. That feedback link is individual data on each beef as it hangs on the rail after grading. This information will help the producer know if the breeding, feeding and slaughter process have come together to meet the consumers needs and the standards set by the cooperative. One of the key provisions in the standards includes a no growth hormones or implants while on feed.

The standards set by the group are not breed specific, so any breed can meet the standard, according to Tom Elliot. However, the coop has set long-term production guidelines, feeding guidelines, and processing guidelines. Tracking the whole production cycle is needed in order to meet coop standards.

The feeling expressed in the group is that it has to be a learning organization, flexible enough to take advantage of new markets, while building on past experiences. And according to Bob Junk, the process is a way to test before making a big investment which may not produce a return-though there are no guarantees, it is a way to increase the possibility of a profitable return for the farmer.

Farmers interested in joining this effort are encouraged to contact John Allen, who is especially looking for seed stock producers who can meet the coop standards.



Steering committee officers of the Pennsylvania Family Farm Beef Cooperative selected at the August 12, 1998 meeting of the steering committee include, (l to r) Secretary Louise D'Isidoro, Fayette County; and co-chairs John Allen, Saxonburgh; Don Gardner, Amity; and Sam Hunt, Uniontown. Photos by David Hiebert.



Cuts of beef are front and center during the press conference announcing the debut of Certified Keystone Beef. People surrounding the platter include (l to r) Don Gardner, Amity, Pa., President of the Washington County Cattleman's Association; Robert Junk, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Farmers Union; and (speaking) Allen Matthews, Millheim, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture.

Land O'Lakes Delegates Elect Corporate Director-Nominees

CARLISLE (Cumberland Co.) — Land O'Lakes delegates representing the Mid-Atlantic region recently elected director-nominees to serve on the Land O'Lakes corporate board.

The delegates elected director-nominees for each of the six membership regions in the Mid-Atlantic. The elections were held during the fall region meeting in Lancaster and will be ratified during the 1999 annual meeting Feb. 24-25 in Minneapolis.

Those elected as director-nominees are Charles E. Schilling, Petersburg, Pa., Region 51; Roy W. Hetrick, Bernville, Pa., Region 52; Gordon B. Hoover, Gap, Pa., Region 53; David N. Noss, Port

Royal, Pa., Region 54; Robert A. Winner, Moorestown, N.J., Region 55; and Kenneth Schoenberg, Shippensburg, Pa., Region 56.

During the meeting, Jack Gherly, president and chief executive officer, thanked the 300 delegates for their leadership and involvement in the cooperative. He also acknowledged their support of the Land O'Lakes/Atlantic Dairy Cooperative merger.

"The merger was a critical step in our efforts to establish a truly national milk procurement and dairy processing system," Gherly said. "An integrated system is a key element in the ongoing formula for dairy industry success."

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