

Penn State's Ag College Dean Reviews First 18 Months

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people and organizations from all segments of the dairy industry from producers to distributors to retailers have come together. All are singing from the same hymnal and now we are getting on the same page. And our voices are getting louder and louder."

At Penn State, Steele sees new programs that cover what is going on today in marketing, production and distribution. He believes there is a new face on Penn State's research and extension, especially in the dairy arena. This is occurring in Dairy and Animal Science, in Veterinary Science, and in Rural Economics and Sociology.

"The message I want to bring is that students now see a future

in agriculture. The number one major in the College is in animal science. You can spend time reading the papers and you would be surpassed at this. Just two years ago, our number one major was environmental resource management. Animal science and agronomy and the plant sciences enrollments were down. But there is an about face. Not that environmental programs are not important, but we have figured out how to integrate them into the animal science curriculum.

"We are doing a good job of turning out students ready for the work force. We can do better. We do a good job in the technical side of the food sciences but we need to more on the business side. We

have responded by putting minors in the curriculum"

Steele agreed that in recent years the funding for agriculture research has been decreasing in part due to what has been coming through from USDA. But he said in the past year, the budget has increased, and grants from private industry now make up a large part of the competitive grants that come to Penn State. Of course the moneys coming from USDA has increased too. Other sources for research funding come from the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Health. Many companies no longer have the research and development structures needed to do their own projects so they look to Penn



Robert Steele

need more outside labor.

"Not only the type of information to be transferred through extension has changed, the methods of transfer have also changed. Along with multi-county agents who are experts in their fields, we have the world wide web and computer science looking to extension to stay on the cutting edge. The rapidly revolving technology has caused us to restructure extension.

"If I could tell all your readers something, I would recommend they step back and look at a broader view. When you do this, things look a lot better than when you are focused on day to day problems which we all have. Being out of Pennsylvania for 35 years and now back for a short while, I see a lot of room for optimism. The optimism we see right now in the dairy industry I hope we can transmit to other segments of agriculture.

"And I would hope that in five years if we ask students graduating this year, they will say we have prepared them for the "real" world of agriculture. We are quite proud of the students and our student internship program that adds to their reassurance. We realize the internships help students get jobs and we hear from employers that we need to do more of it.

"I'll come back to the partnership issue," Steele said "With Penn State's agriculture production programs, partnering with food science, forestry resources, and the wildlife segments, we triple the size of our voice in the world. An then add agribusiness and community interests and we have the partnership that Penn State wants to have with and for agriculture"

State scientists to do the work.

"The future of agriculture is all about food and fiber," Steele said. "I'm convinced there will always be people on this planet and they will need to eat. So, there will always be an agriculture segment, but it will be different. This has always been so. When we left the last century, we came to 1889 wondering what would be coming in the future. We had subsistence agriculture back then. But with the invention of refrigeration and the development of a transportation system change was inevitable. When you can move product off the farm and get it to someone who wants it or needs it, agriculture

takes on a totally different face.

"Now we are entering the computer and information technology age, and we have just scratched the surface. When you have bright clever people, wonderful things will happen.

"Part of the mission of extension has been redefined. When extension was officially formed in 1914 it was called upon to help a relatively uneducated group of people to improve their lives in production agriculture. The county agent for the most part was more educated than the farmer. This has changed a lot. The farmer is now as educated as the extension agent and we have the challenge to keep the county agent informed of the latest information available. And the needs have changed. Often the need is not for animal nutrition or genetics but in business and labor management. If you are to have larger operations then you will

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