

## No Substitute For Carcass Quality Consistency

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Lancaster Farming Staff

**LANCASTER** (Lancaster Co.) — Those who raise feeder calves and feeder cattle need to pay more attention to genetics and health care if they intend to remain in the business of raising beef for retail cuts.

That seemed to be the overall message presented by a number of speakers at a recent Lancaster County Extension Cattle Feeder's Day event held at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center.

The cattle feeder's day event is sponsored by Penn State Extension with support from some agribusinesses and is held annually to provide an educational forum for producers and those interested in learning more about industry and market trends, feeder cattle raising techniques and issues, and completed and ongoing research.

Morning speakers including H. Louis Moore, Penn State University agricultural economics professor, who discussed the outlook for the feeder cattle market; Jeff Stoltzfus, an adult farmer instructor in the Eastern Lancaster County School District, who discussed nutrient management concerns for cattle feeders; Dr. John Thompson, Iowa State University professor of production animal medicine, who discussed establishing valid working relationships between cattle feeders, veterinarians and the cattle being fed; and Dr. John Comerford, Penn State Extension beef specialist who discussed a Penn State survey of cattle feeders.

Afternoon speakers included Dr. Glenn Rogers, North Carolina State University assistant professor of ruminant production medicine, who talked about animal health programs for feedlots; Dr. Comerford again, this time discussing the basics of "expected progeny differences" (EPD); Dr. Erskine Cash, Penn State University professor of animal science, who discussed the practical uses of EPDs in the feeder cattle industry;

and Bob Livingston, cattle manager at South Branch Farms, who discussed his use of EPDs and carcass evaluations in a producer-retailer relationship he is in that helps his operation achieve a return on investment by ensuring that investment and effort is used to gain value, not just cattle weight.

Also speaking was Tammy Weaver, director of industry relations for the Pennsylvania Beef Council (PBC), a cattle producer-funded beef promotion, marketing and research program.

Weaver discussed some of the new products developed through the help of the PBC, such as the Rotiss-A-Roast pre-cooked roast beef modern family meal product, which was offered on site as part of a \$5 lunch, served by a caterer.

### Beef Council Develops Products

According to Weaver, while the beef industry has lost some of its domestic market share to the poultry industry, as is widely known and reported, the work being done through the producer-supported marketing and research effort is giving the industry its best leghold against slipping further, as well as strengthening the industry's position to move forward.

She explained that the poultry industry's growth in capturing

more of the domestic consumer market is not only due to past health scares spread among the general public about cholesterol and beef, but more so because the poultry industry has created and is a leader in providing convenience meals.

Rotissarie chicken is common in most of the major supermarket store chains, and Weaver said that it offers consumers an easy and quick decision about what to have for an evening meal, especially since most consumers are short on time for cooking.

It is expected that, in order to remain competitive, it is necessary to provide consumers with a quick and easy meal solution with beef as the meat, she said.

The new roast beef product is designed for that and she said that Giant Food Stores Inc. has agreed to be the first major chain to offer the product. It should be available in March, she said.

Weaver said other developments are in the works, in an attempt to better position beef for consumer selection.

According to Weaver, there are 28 new products involving beef and veal, in addition to deli-counter rotissarie beef. She said work is being done to improve the use and demand for certain portions of the carcass as well, such as for cuts from the chuck and round.

Weaver also showed two video tape versions of a new beef commercial following the slogan, "Beef. It's What's For Dinner," featuring movie star and celebrity Sam Elliott. The commercial was produced as a 30-second commercial, also edited into 10- and 20-second versions to fit different formats and budgets.

Weaver also explained how the Pa. Beef Council has also been targeting youth to provide educational information on proper sanitary hygiene, especially in the kitchen and with food handling.

"We feel we can affect food safety by going to the youth," Weaver said, adding that it has been discovered that many elementary age youth have not received proper instruction in proper hygiene and safe food handling practices.

She showed a video that has been produced to instruct youth on those two issues, "The 4Cs Rap."

The four "Cs" stand for: Cool it, for cooling the meat in the freezer or refrigerator quickly after purchasing it; Clean it, for washing hands and handling surfaces and tools; Cook it, for cooking beef to the appropriate doneness, according to temperature; and, don't Cross it, which is for avoiding putting cooked meats onto a tray or surface or using any unwashed

utensils that had come into contact with the uncooked meat.

She said the Beef Council educational program has been requested in about 500 schools, and the visits are to be conducted through the year, every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Information packets are to be sent to schools that can't be accommodated through the promotion program.

### Feeder Cattle Cycling Back

In other news, H. Louis Moore, a regular industry and Extension event economic speaker, annually provides an early year outlook for the meat and livestock industry.

He has predicted that, based on industry inventories and inexpensive feed, as well as cyclical trends in the beef industry, that cattle feeders ought to be able to make a small margin in 1999 — about \$50 per head — coming back from big losses for 1998.

Most of the nation's agricultural production industry has suffered low commodity prices for at least the past year. Especially hurt have been independent producers.

For those unfamiliar with the current commodity pricing situation, common knowledge is that low producer prices have resulted

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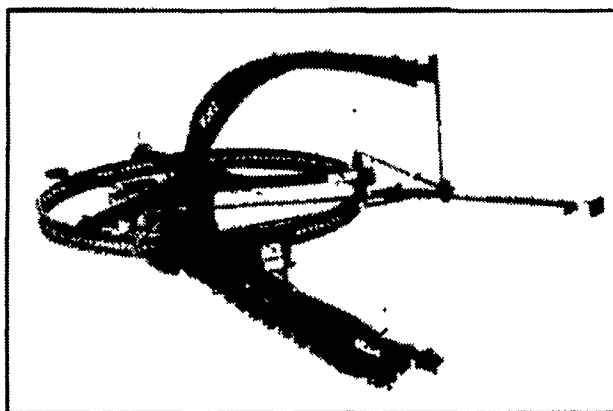
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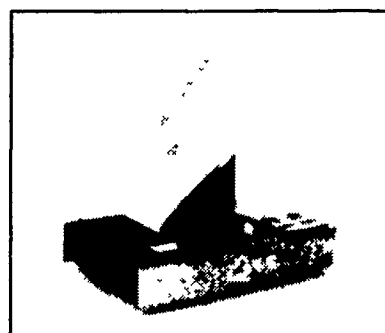
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