

## PennAg Industries Provides Production Ag Insights

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**SCHAEFFERSTOWN** (Lebanon Co.) — A group of state legislators and their staff recently toured several "advanced farms" in Lebanon and Lancaster counties, through a program offered by PennAg Industries Association Inc.

"Advanced farms" are described in the literature distributed during the tour as, "high-yield, livestock-raising activities that benefit from new technologies."

The definition is a departure from the trend in defining the more recent developments in livestock production, in that it avoids any reference to animal density or numbers.

Current federal and state environmental laws concerning livestock operations consider them, respectively, as "concentrated animal feeding operations" (CAFO) and "concentrated animal operations" (CAO).

However, the different emphasis in the definition chosen by PennAg is perhaps more accurate.

The difference in definition seems a reflection of different agendas.

Federal and state government agencies and rulemakers concerned with nutrient management aspects have chosen to focus on volumes of manure as a threat. Therefore, the number of animals on a farm is emphasized as an indicator of an environmental threat.

PennAg membership is concerned with raising livestock profitably and with the least amount of risk and headaches.

Anything that exposes investment to loss is a threat, and short-cutting on manure management doesn't make business sense.

The farms toured have gone well beyond minimums required for nutrient management laws.

The risks they pose to the environment are very slight — it would be difficult to create a plausible scenario in which they could pose a threat.

Nevertheless, these are the style of operations that have been bad-mouthed as "corporate" farming, held up by anti-agriculturalists as threats to human health, and targeted by new development urbanites as environmental nuisances.

PennAg is an association of agricultural producers, feed and equipment dealers and manufacturers, and other agricultural support businesses.

The industry association makes no excuses for bad actors, or the negative environmental impacts that poor practice farming can cause. But neither does it side with commuters in new developments trying to shut down local farming.

Instead, it seeks to educate lawmakers and policy leaders about the activities that predominate livestock production, in Pennsylvania.

According to Walt Peechatka, executive vice president of PennAg, the tour was put together to offer legislators a first-hand look at actual modern farming operations so they can better know the difference between what is really the situation in farming, and what is being told to them by agricultural opposition groups, misinformation perpetuated by ill-researched news reporting, and other misguided reports.

PennAg's role is to serve as an educational catalyst between agriculturalists and lawmakers and law enforcement.

Last week, Peechatka met with a group of legislators in Harrisburg at the state Capitol, and traveled with them on a bus to meet with the rest of the tour group in the parking lot of the historic Franklin House in Schaefferstown, where other legislators and staff traveled directly.

Technical and educational support for the tour came from several PennAg members, such as Wenger Feeds Inc. and Hostetter Management Company.

The companies represent a segment involved in what is called "integrated" agriculture — alliances and effort coordination are done from production through processing. Marketing is generally another level above, but can be involved.

The day, and group, was divided between morning and afternoon trips. That way participants could either visit one of two swine facilities and also a poultry facility.

Because of the biosecurity restrictions on the swine facilities — complete head-to-toe body showers are required before entering the area where the swine are housed and cared for — there were two facilities offered to participants. Some went to visit a 1,400-sow farrowing operation in nearby Lancaster County, while others visited a 700-sow farrowing house within walking distance of the Franklin House in downtown Schaefferstown.

The poultry operation that was toured — an 80,000-bird layer house — was located closer to Newmanstown. The contract farmer who permitted the tour group to view the facilities requested that no photographs be taken nor family names be mentioned in any news report.

According to tour participants, they were impressed with the cleanliness, attention to detail, and lack of odor, at each of the facilities.

In Pennsylvania, livestock producers, especially those operations defined as "integrated," are finding more and more governing boards of local municipalities created ordinances aimed at banning what are being called, "coporate" farming methods.

Generally, "integration" consists of a landowner who invests in a building and operational plan and who performs the day-to-day maintenance operations, an owner of the animals, an owner of the feed, and a marketer who contracts for the production of commodities at a specific rate of profit per unit.

For example, at the layer operation, the farmers received a certain amount of income for each egg produced.

The farmer doesn't take on the risk of the investment in the layer birds, worth more than \$2 each when brought to the house at several weeks old. Either the marketer or some other entity, such as a group of investors, puts up the money and thus financial risk, for the birds.

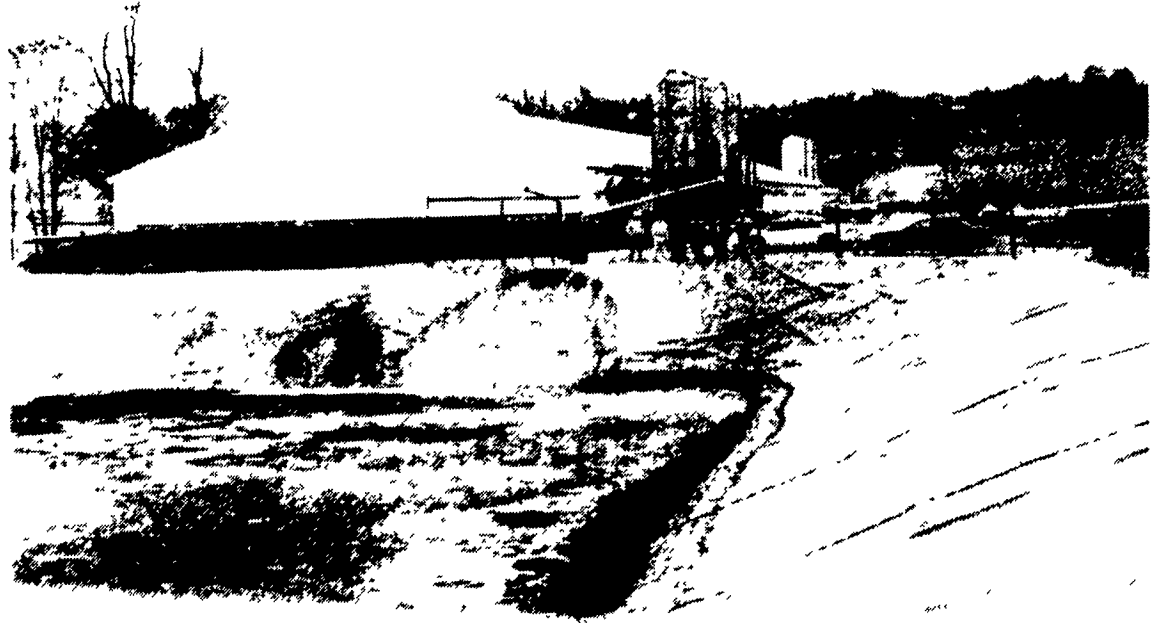
The feed used is not the financial responsibility of the farmer either. That risk is held by another partner.

The farmer is required to protect the birds from infection by following a prophylactic routine, such as not allowing people into the facility unless they first don a clean jumpsuit, boots and hair-hat.

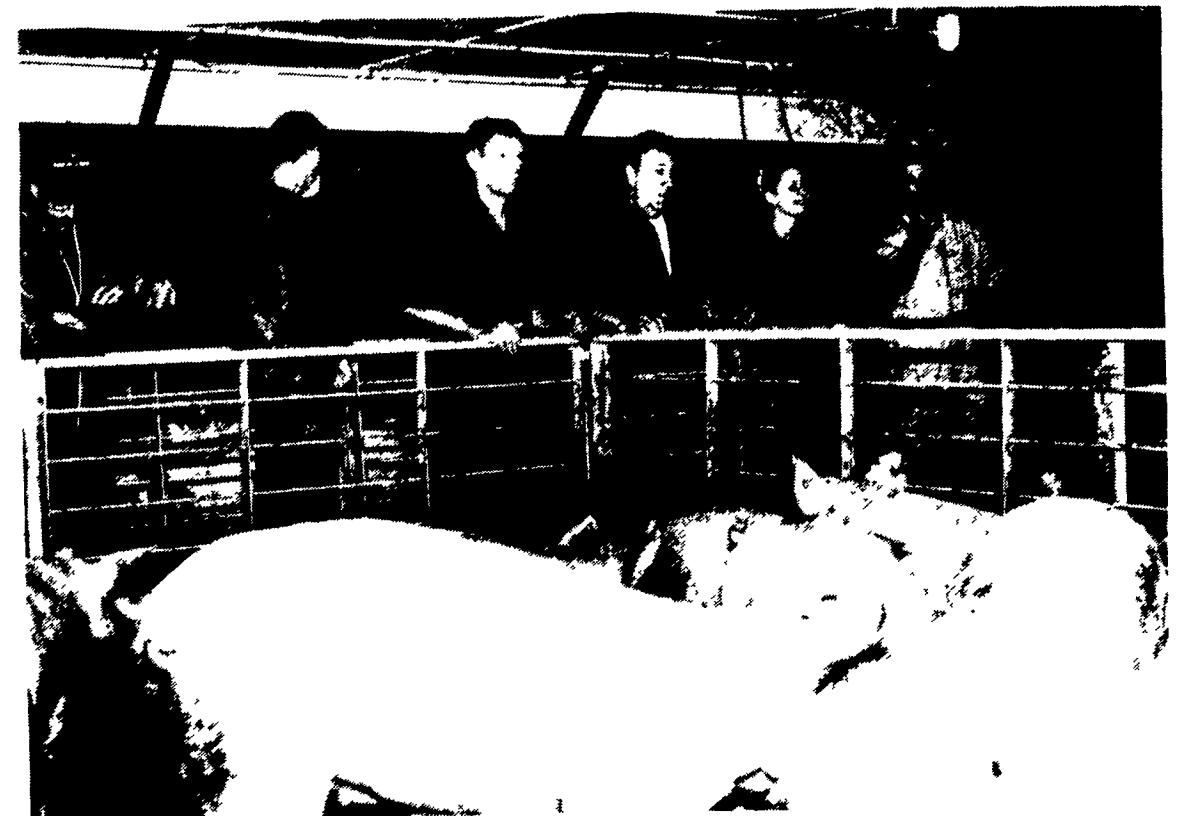
The hog facilities actually require that visitors strip of the clothes they wore to the premises,



The outfits may not win them any prizes, but the group is no longer a threat to chickens. From the left, members of a legislative tour group about to enter an 80,000-layer house, are Jay Howes, hosts Bill Rogers and Bob Sydel, Rep. Raymond Bunt, Jennifer Loy, Owen Thomas, Lynn Slabicki, Rep. Allan Egolf, and Jim Shirk with PennAg Industries Association.



Members of a PennAg legislative tour look over this 1.2 million gallon manure lagoon that receives manure via gravity from the 700-sow farrowing facility behind it. The lack of odor is demonstrated, and the liner is highlighted because it voluntarily exceeded requirements to ensure beyond any doubt that the facility was environmentally compatible.



A legislative tour groups looks over the breeding holding pens for sows at a Lebanon County farrowing facility. From the left is Jay Howes, Owen Thomas, state Rep. Allan Egolf, Rep. Raymond Bunt, Jennifer Loy, and Rick Martin, who operates the family farm facility with his father.