

Seedmen Discuss Industry Issues At Winter Meeting

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CENTERVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — Issues at the forefront of the seed industry include allegations of PCB contamination in fish feed, invasive plants, and the effects of the worst drought in Pennsylvania history on the quality and availability of seed.

Those and many more went before about two dozen agri-industry representatives Wednesday at the Pennsylvania Seedmen's Association annual winter meeting at the Comfort Inn, Centerville.

At center stage for the Feed, Grain, and Allied Industries Council of PennAg Industries, Ephrata, is the allegation put forward by the state fish and boat commission that higher than U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have been found in fish species. PCBs are considered poisonous industrial environmental pollutants that tend to accumulate in animal tissues.

The allegations could have large and extensive implications for aquaculture and the feed industry, noted Walt Peechatka, executive vice president of PennAg Industries, who spoke at the seedsmen's meeting.

"This could be a very difficult issue for the industry," Peechatka said.

PennAg Industries, which has about 600 business-members, has to work on strategies to deal with this "front-burner" issue, noted Peechatka.

According to the PennAg vice

president, the FDA ceiling for PCBs in feed is 2 parts per million (ppm). All feed tested meets the FDA standard. But the fish and boat commission and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have adopted the Great Lakes Standard of .06 ppm of PCBs in the actual fish.

Earl Haas, chief of the Division of Agronomic Services of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's bureau of Plant Industry, said the PCB issue "fell into our laps."

At one time, because of evidence of PCBs detected in certain species, the fish and boat commission and the game commission announced that people shouldn't eat fish. The commissions have since rescinded, Haas noted.

"They are pointing the finger at feed with no scientific evidence that feed is involved in any way," he said. Of the sampled feeds, "none of the feeds are anywhere near the tolerance level" of the FDA, said Haas.

The feed targeted areas, noted the agronomic services chief, include the byproducts, including animal fats, which most likely would contain above-permitted levels of PCBs.

Until strategies can be developed, the seed industry has to work closely with PennAg to ensure ways to protect the feed industry.

Peechatka noted that the state fish and state game commissions are independent agencies, not under the auspices of the governor's policy office, according to the PennAg vice president. So it is



Speakers at the Pennsylvania Seedmen's Association winter meeting Wednesday included, from left, Steve Smith, outgoing president; Fred Mohr, incoming president; Earl Haas, chief of the Division of Agronomic Services, PDA Bureau of Plant Industry; Steve DeBroux, assistant professor of agronomy and environment sciences, Delaware Valley College; and Don Wertman.

difficult to ensure cooperation on the side of agriculture.

"It's not going to be easy," said Peechatka.

Peechatka noted that PennAg Industries is moving from its Ephrata office on Jan. 4 to a new address: Northwoods Office Center, Suite 39, 2215 Forest Hills Dr., Harrisburg, Pa 17112. The phone number was unavailable as of presstime.

Because of the move, PennAg is advertising three positions that, because of the move, have been

vacated. They include bookkeeper, director of communications (a person to handle publications and news releases), and a secretary.

The move is a big transition for the 120-year-old organization, noted Peechatka. Some staff members have been with the organization for 10 and 20 years.

PennAg also has been working closely with S.B. 300, amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code. The bill is the "bible" for local governments, said Peechatka, in terms of agriculture expan-

sion and new enterprises. PennAg is working to ensure that agriculture is protected in the amendments. It has passed the Senate and is in the House.

Peechatka noted that the Clinton Administration has been working on a new food safety initiative for eggs. The initiative is modeled after the Pennsylvania Egg Quality Assurance Program (PEQAP). The Poultry Council arm of PennAg Industries has recently been granted a \$50,000 grant from the

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All-Star Lineup 'Reclaim The PASAbilities,' At Farming For The Future Conference

MILLHEIM (Centre Co.) — On the farm of the future, contented cows share lush pastures with poultry and pigs. Compost-enriched soil brims with life; milk checks are as ample as the grasshoppers that nourish the chickens; purchased inputs are low, production is high, and the next generation of farmers eagerly awaits their turn at the helm.

A pipe dream? No.

A PASAbility? Definitely.

And much of the information needed to create sustainable systems will be available Feb. 4-5 at the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's 9th annual Farming for the Future Conference. With an all-star cast of presenters, including internationally renowned speakers Vandana Shiva and John Todd, considering the theme — "The Next Agricultural Revolution: Reclaiming the PASAbilities" — the time will be right to learn from those who are experiencing successes with sustainable systems and who believe in their importance.

Roman Stoltzfoos, a Lancaster County dairy farmer, has returned to dairy's roots, so to speak, with his profitable grass-based system. Those who attended the PASA-sponsored field day at the Stoltzfoos's Spring Wood Farm this past July saw first-hand how the farm operates. At the conference, Stoltzfoos will give additional insight into Spring Wood's economic success; Arden Landis, Kim Miller, and Russ Tomlinson, all Pennsylvania graziers, will also speak on dairy and beef grass-based systems.

On the poultry side, Diane Kauffman, from Wisconsin, editor of the American Pastured Poultry Producers Association's "Grit," and Ray Bolton of Kutztown will talk about raising chickens on grass.

"From starting the chicks to the barbeque ending, I will walk you through the process to point out the pitfalls along the way, facilities needed, equipment, type of chicken, etc.," Bolton said.

Conference attendees will also hear from New Hampshire orchardist Michael Phillips (a civil engineering grad from Penn State) on growing fruit trees organically; Dr. Elaine R. Ingham, president of the Oregon-based Soil Foodweb Inc., on improving the soil foodweb in order to improve plant production and on making the best use of compost and Argyle, N.Y. organic vegetable/fruit farmers Paul and Sandy Arnold on season extension for small-farm profitability.

Keynote speakers are Vandana Shiva and John Todd.

Shiva, author, Alternative Nobel Peace Prize winner, environmentalist, and a panelist at numerous hearings during the recent World Trade Organization conference in Seattle, is an outspoken advocate for traditional, sustainable farming practices, biodiversity, and the preservation of native seeds.

Todd, author, ecological designer, lauded by both the United Nations Environmental Program and the United States' Environmental Protection Agency for his environmental work, is perhaps most well-known for his "Living Machines"

wastewater treatment systems. He echoes William McDonough, 1999 conference keynote speaker, when he speaks of redesigning cities and towns to treat their own wastes, to heat their own buildings, and to produce their own food.

Other conference workshops

will consider timely topics such as genetically modified organisms, seed stock and seed ownership, community supported agriculture and value-added marketing. As usual, there will be an abundance of workshops on rotational grazing, organic vegetable production, and compost-

ing. The event includes a return of the popular "Rotational grazing Feast," a celebratory banquet of regional sustainably and organically produced food.

For conference registration information, contact PASA at P.O. Box 419, Millheim, PA 16854, (814) 349-9856, or www.pasafarming.org

Ag Dept. Approves Beef, Pork Irradiation

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Meat packers have received long-awaited approval to start irradiating beef, pork, and lamb to kill deadly bacteria and other organisms. Whether shoppers will go for ground beef or pork chops that have been zapped remains to be seen.

Irradiation "is not the most attractive term. It would have been nicer if it had been called 'cold pasteurization,'" said Tim Willard, a spokesman for the National Food Processors Association.

It is the only known method to eliminate deadly E. coli O157:H7 bacteria in raw meat. The technique also can significantly reduce levels of other pathogens, including listeria, salmonella and campylobacter, according to the USDA.

Initially, irradiated meat is likely to be most popular with hospitals and nursing homes because of the danger E. coli poses to patients with weakened immune systems, said Carol Tucker Foreman, a distinguished fellow with the Consumer Federation of America.

"I don't expect you're going to

get it for sale at McDonald's any time soon. It takes a while to build the facilities," she said.

Irradiation has been approved for poultry since 1992 and is under consideration for hot dogs, lunch meats, and other ready-to-eat products.

"While there is no single silver bullet to cure all food safety problems, irradiation has been shown to be both safe and effective," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said recently in giving final approval to the program.

Labels on irradiated products will have to carry the international symbol for irradiation, known as a "radura," and a statement that the products were treated. The symbol, colored green on a white background, depicts two leaves resting in a semicircle, with a green dot above it beneath a broken-lined

semicircle. Sausage that contains irradiated meat also will have to be labeled.

Several companies, including ConAgra Inc., one of the nation's biggest meat packers, have said they plan to use irradiation. But processors say the government needs to undertake a public education campaign to convince consumers that irradiation is safe.

"Ultimately, consumers' purchase behavior will drive the availability of this product," said J. Patrick Boyle, president of the American Meat Institute. "If consumers embrace the product, the industry is in the business of meeting consumer demand, and we will respond with more irradiated products."

E. coli O157:H7 can cause serious illness and sometimes death, especially in children and the elderly.

