

Companion Animals: A New Initiative in Animal Science

PENN STATE



College of Agricultural Sciences

From the Department of Dairy and Animal Science

This regular column from Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science features the research findings, student opportunities, and reports on other important topics generated in the Department. The back issues of the column are archived on *Lancaster Farming's* Internet www.lancasterfarming.com home page. Look for them.

Harold Harpster and Gabriella Varga
Department of Dairy and Animal Science
Penn State

With the spring semester well underway we are both in a "teaching mode" so let's begin this column with a quiz. What animal industry:

- 1) Will generate over \$11 billion in feed sales in the US and over \$26 billion worldwide?
- 2) Has an annual rate of sales growth of 4 to 7%?
- 3) Utilizes U.S. crops at the rate of over 35 million tons of corn and a million tons of soybeans annually?
- 4) Utilizes over 1.5 million tons of poultry, swine and beef byproducts annually and in so doing directly supports dairy, livestock, and poultry producers?
- 5) Feeds over 125 million head of "livestock" per day with the equivalent of 850 railroad boxcar loads of feed, each containing 40 tons?
- 6) Directly supports the viability of many rural farm businesses?

Yes, the answer in each case is the pet food industry and these figures do not include the untold millions spent on veterinary care, grooming, toys, equipment, sporting and competitive events, and many others.

Obviously an industry of this magnitude requires a variety of trained professionals. Until recently few traditional animal science departments have provided undergraduate course work in the companion animal area. The demand for such information is growing as more students entering animal science majors come from non-farm backgrounds and many lack any real experience with farm animals. At Penn State we see increasing numbers of new

students indicate that companion animals are their number one species interest

To address this need, we recently began to offer "Animal Science 305 - Companion Animal Care and Nutrition," a 3 credit course that students may use as one of their "animal management" selections. We have five learning objectives that we expect students to accomplish:

1. Develop an appreciation for the role and importance of companion animals in our society.
2. Develop an understanding of the basic nutritional and environmental needs of companion animals.
3. Develop skills in the formulation of diets for companion animals.
4. Develop the basic management skills required for the proper care of

companion animals.

5. Develop an appreciation for the economic importance of companion animals and the career opportunities they offer.

In line with the interests of many students, we emphasize dogs and cats in our lectures. However, other species are addressed including birds, reptiles, and several small mammal species. We address the nutritional and reproductive biology of each species. The more applied areas of feeding, housing and management are also discussed.

We have been very fortunate in obtaining the help and support of several off-campus folks who have been valuable in providing "real world" experiences for our students. The Lang family, owners of Dad's Products Company, INC. in Meadville, PA., have been most generous in hosting our class each year. They have provided transportation and lodging for a two-day class trip to their pet food facility. All aspects of pet food

manufacture are discussed and we tour the entire plant. Most of our students are astonished to see the size and scale of the facilities for modern pet food manufacture

Metzger Animal Hospital in nearby State College has also shared their time and talents. Dr. Fred Metzger and Dr. Bob Rider lecture in class on modern animal health care followed by an informative tour of their hospital facility.

Finally, the Tom Battalina family, owners of Tornado Hollow Kennel in Cochranton, PA. give the students an overview of managing a family-owned kennel. Field-trial retrieving demonstrations using several of their outstanding Labrador Retrievers leave us in awe of the abilities of these outstanding canines!

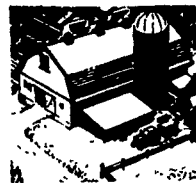
We certainly haven't abandoned our interests in traditional animal agriculture, but it's been fun to branch out into the companion animal species. For those young people considering enrollment in Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science, this course represents an opportunity to gain knowledge and experience in this growing segment of animal agriculture!

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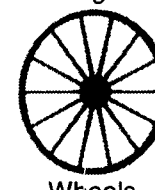
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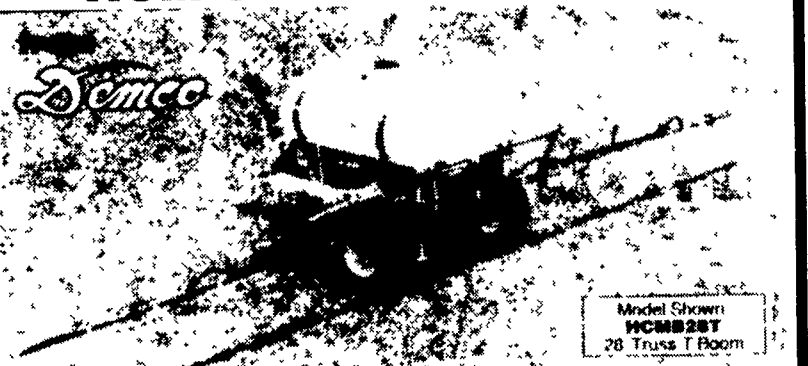


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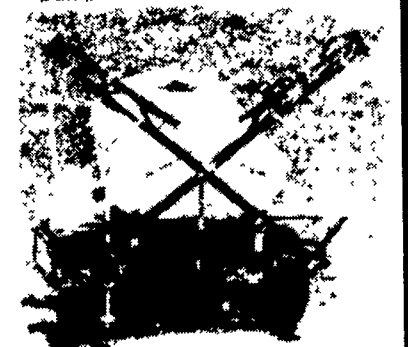
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