



John Lord, St. Joseph University, far right, confers with James Dunn, Penn State, center, and conference attendee Eugene Wingert, St. Thomas, at the grazing and forage conference.



President-elect Ed Koncle, right, is congratulated by outgoing president Ed Rits at the conference.

## Food Retailers React To Wal-Mart, Serve 'Convenience' Culture

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Lancaster Farming Staff

GRANTVILLE (Dauphin Co.) — Food retailers see a grim future, in terms of results of investments — only a 1 percent increase in food price and only 1 percent growth in population annually.

This comes at a time when Wall Street stockholders want to see 8, 10, even 12-percent growth in business yearly, according to a professor of food marketing at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

John Lord noted that food items already have 100 percent U.S. household penetration. The growth

rate for most products "is simply not there."

So how to change that?

Lord, who spoke last month at the 2000 Pennsylvania Grazing and Forage Conference at the Grantville Holiday Inn, noted that everything being done in supermarkets is a reaction to Wal-Mart — provide discount prices, service a "culture of convenience," and promote products that foster cooking as a hobby more than a chore.

This is all happening at a time when "sales of cookbooks are at an all-time high," Lord said.

As a result, marketers have had

to realign their products to face a constantly on-the-go population. But people still want the ambience and the sensory experience — the sounds and smells — of cooking.

Lord said it is no longer considered "convenient" any more to take out a box of cereal, get a bowl, dump the contents, and pour in the milk. Instead, specialty boxes, packaging, and new ways of preparing are rising to the forefront of superstore marketing.

America is no longer a "melting pot" of cultures. It is more like a salad, he said.

Hispanics will be the largest

minority by the year 2010. And packagers are looking to serve the clientele, promote the health of products, and provide convenience while not giving up taste.

Kids alone spend about \$7.7 billion per year on food.

Increasingly, the emphasis on healthy products for a busy lifestyle will put more demands on food variety, ease of preparation, and overall food safety.

According to James Dunn, Penn State, with the Internet you can "find people interested in your obscure product," he said. "People are no longer restricted to local sources for food."

More mergers are common in  
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