

Facility Siting: Building Long-Term Relationships That Work

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Wenger was careful to note there are millions of issues regarding siting and he said he was no expert.

The methods used in the past have been wrought with stubbornness and ill-timed decisions that have sometimes been kept out of public consideration. The resulting lawsuits and financial problems prove that past thinking "is not working," said Wenger. "We have to engage the public, and we have to do that honestly."

The key is to separate the quantifiable, engineered, permitted ideas and that "mindset," he said, from items hard to quantify — public reaction to a building going in on farmland.

In what ways does the public benefit? Wenger asked those at the seminar. "It's not that the public is stupid," he said. "It's not that they are even so much ignorant. It's just that they don't have a clue of what we're doing. They don't have any idea of what we're talking about. They don't even know what these farms look like, in many cases."

Wenger pointed to one case where even a simple thing such as farm tour for the community decision-makers would have done some good. Despite some best efforts, the old ways of thinking, however, remain.

"What we're doing over and over and over is creating win/lose situations, we versus they, we win, they lose, they win, we lose, and does any of this sound familiar at all?"

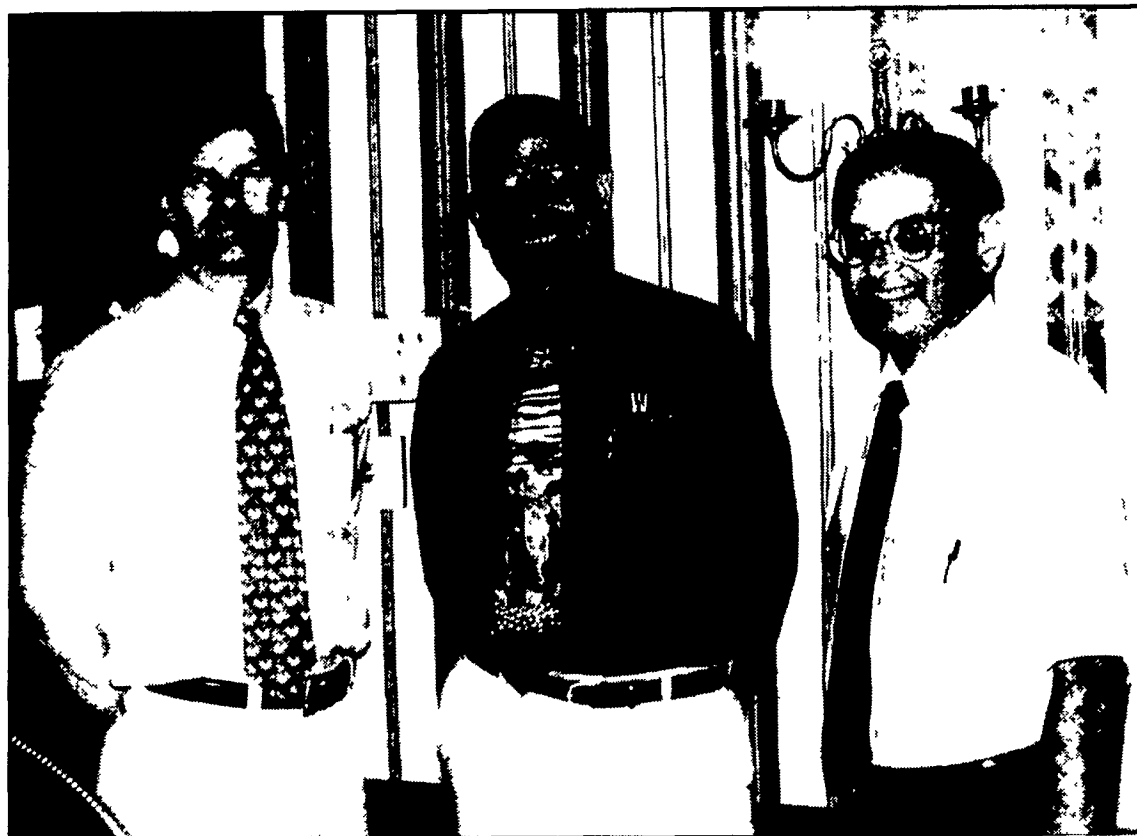
The public is angry, sometimes, and that anger could be identified three different ways. It could be fear of "we're going to do something that's going to harm you," said Wenger. Or "we're doing something that's already harmed you," he noted. Or the public simply could be angry about a principle of opposition.

When everything is factored in, one important point that can't be overlooked is the inherent risk.

"Why should anybody want to take risk?" he said, looking toward those attending the seminar. "I'm going to put a hog barn next to you — why do you want to take the risk that it's going to stink? What am I going to offer you?"

"You like what you see, you like your way of life. What's your incentive to take a risk? You don't like what it looks like. You got a beautiful view here of this field — I'm going to put a chicken house there, you can't see that anymore. I'm not going to spread any manure except twice a year — you gonna trust me? Never had a spill — trust me? Never had a fly problem — trust me? We 'don't operate that way' — trust me?"

"What do we promise these people when we come into a community? Why should they even want us to come in? What do we tell them? Jobs?" Wenger pointed to the already low unemployment that exists, with plenty of work for people who want it. "What reason have we



Before moving any ground, said Al Wenger of Wenger Feeds, Rheems, center, "talk to nearby neighbors personally and early," he told about three dozen poultry producers and agri-industry representatives Monday afternoon. At left is Paul Patterson, Penn State poultry professor and at right, John Schwartz, Lancaster County extension director. Photo by Andy Andrews

given them to accept us?" he said.

In many cases, all the neighbors see is traffic, smell, dirty water, loss of privacy, and other things.

"Before we do anything," said Wenger, "we have to get out in front of these things and be proactive. Being reactive — and we've been in many cases — trying to fix things after we find the community group is already mad at us . . . more importantly is to get out in front and talk to the community and talk

to the neighbors proactively and talk about their concerns up front and be honest with them."

A business with a proposal for a confinement facility has to look further ahead. The business plan has to have all the plans completely drawn out, which includes site plans, pictures, line of site, winds, potential annoyances and how to deal with them, proposed solutions, and many tangible factors.

But going beyond that, even, could be key. That includes installing double-wide sets of ev-

ergreens, industrial landscaping, paving even the neighbor's farm lane — possible solutions to potential, long-term concerns.

Wenger said the business has to "think in terms of what value you can bring to your neighbor for you being there."

And before you push even a pound of dirt, Wenger said it may be a good idea to get water samples from neighbors' wells. Or even have the land and neighborhood property assessed.

Get time to plead your case

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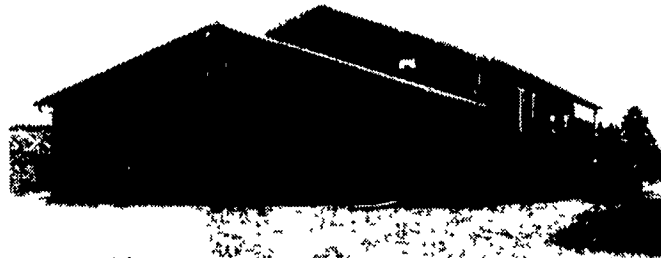


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