

# Berks Ag Conference Looks To The Future

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Lancaster Farming Staff

**WYOMISSING (Berks Co.)** — Advancements in agriculture are critical to the success of agriculture here in Berks County, and a forum to chart that future is on the horizon.

Scheduled Friday and Saturday, Jan. 12-13, the conference will center on the issues critical to the future of agriculture in the county.

The conference, "Charting the Future of Berks County Agriculture: Farming and Food Processing In the 21st Century," begins with a dinner Jan. 12 at 6:30 p.m. at the Inn at Reading in Wyomissing.

Art Brown, New Jersey secretary of agriculture, is the keynote speaker.

Conference sessions begin in the Perkins Student Union Building at the Berks-Lehigh Valley College of Penn State, Spring Township, Jan. 13.

One speaker is Ronald S. Kensinger, Penn State associate professor of nutrition

physiology and associate director of the Intercollege Graduate Program In Nutrition.

Kensinger's topic will be "21st Century Foods: Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering."

According to Kensinger, we have been using biotechnology "for literally centuries," he said. But recombinant technology, or genetically engineered advancements, have only been with us in recent years.

For instance, a substance called rennin (also called "chymosin") is an enzyme used in

cheese-making. The material was discovered in a calf's stomach, which causes milk to curdle.

Cheese, made from the casein proteins in milk, used to be made from taking calf stomachs, grinding them up, and, following a lengthy, wasteful process, the rennin was obtained.

Now, the genetically identified bovine gene is simply extracted and placed in bacteria to make the material needed for cheese-making.

Kensinger is looking at the direct human benefits that genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, have provided. He will look at the Roundup Ready crops, including corns, and the Bt gene in crops, why those crops were developed, and the potential concerns.

Those concerns are "hot issues today," said Kensinger. Though the benefits of those crops are an "easy sale" to farmers, the public remains largely ignorant.

"There is a lot of ignorance out there," said Kensinger. "People understand less about science and agriculture."

For Bt corns, there are tens of thousands of genes in the mix. The companies changed one of them, essentially allowing the corn plant to retain 99.9 percent of the genes, thus ensuring "desirable qualities of the plant" are not lost, according to Kensinger.

Kensinger will review the evolution of technological breakthroughs and give changing farm practices a "historical perspective," he said.

Also speaking during the sessions will be John Lord, professor of food marketing at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia.

Lord will present a topic dealing with understanding food consumers and "mining the opportunities," he said.

Lord noted that the public understands little about biotech and what's going on with GMO issues.

Lord noted it's important to provide the link from food production to how companies use marketing strategies to produce, position, package, and distribute the final food product.

## 2001 Farm Show To Feature Horticultural Research

**HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)** — Agriculture Secretary Sam Hayes announced the 85th Pennsylvania Farm Show will feature a "high tunnel" research exhibit to demonstrate the latest agriculture-production technology to increase grower profitability with minimal capital expense.

"Pennsylvania Produce is 'Simply Delicious' and always in high demand, in Pennsylvania and around the globe," Hayes said. "High tunnel usage has the potential to increase a farmer's profitability by extending their growing season."

"In comparison to the more traditional produce production regions of the South, Pennsylvania has a relatively short growing season. As the demand for locally grown vegetables and fruit increases, Pennsylvania growers are seeking ways to provide these fresh foods in a timely manner to meet consumer needs."

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture in cooperation with Penn State, the research is used to modify the environment and other manage-

The speech will be similar to the one given during sessions promoted by the Institute of Food Technology (IFT). Lord said he speaks at five or six presentations per year at the request of the IFT.

Lord speaks at several ag conferences as well. He spoke in March during the 2000 Pennsylvania Grazing and Forage Conference in Grantville.

The conference, developed by the Berks County Board of Com-

missioners, also includes sessions on future markets, workforce availability, land availability and use issues, consumer demographics and market trends, food safety, financial issues, agriculture laws and regulations, processor needs, and the future of agriculture in Pennsylvania. Sessions begin at 8 a.m. and continue through 12:30 p.m.

The market value of Berks agriculture products sold generates \$247 million on an annual basis.

ment factors to enhance crop yield, growth, and quality in a profitable manner. "High tunnels" elevate the air and ground temperature within the structure a few degrees each day over a period of several weeks. Crops such as tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, cut flowers, and small fruits are under trial.

Hayes said the high tunnel exhibit will be on display in Exhibition Room B of the Farm Show Complex. The exhibit will feature Pennsylvania produce and

self-watering grow boxes. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has arranged for Penn State Cooperative Extension agents, specialists and master gardeners to answer questions about the commercial production of vegetables and small fruits using the high tunnel method. The high tunnel research is part of the Agriculture Department's vegetable and fruit-marketing program known as "Pennsylvania Produce — Simply Delicious."

## Angus Program Offered For Producers

**ST. JOSEPH, Mo.** — The American Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef (CAB) LLC will host a special program for commercial producers during the 2001 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show, set for Feb. 1-4 in San Antonio, Texas.

"Improving Genetics Through Angus Technology" is the theme for the program, which will feature speakers from the American

Angus Association commercial relations department and the CAB supply development division. The event is set for Friday, Feb. 2, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Marriott Rivercenter Hotel.

The American Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef Program are continuously working on programs and services that give commercial producers the edge in beef production.

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