

# Producers Share Direct-Marketing Strategies

**DAVE LEFEVER**  
Lancaster Farming Staff

**MIFFLINBURG (Union Co.)**

— Producers and processors of agricultural products ranging from beef, milk, and poultry to garlic and herbs gathered on the farm of Bill Callahan north of Mifflinburg Tuesday to share ideas about how to sell their goods directly to consumers.

About 20 interested agriculturalists, from age eight and up, toured Callahan's pasture-based beef and poultry operation. They heard Callahan detail the methods he is developing to sell what he calls "source-verifiable" food to the local community, including the towns of Lewisburg and Mifflinburg.

The meeting was one of a continuing series of grazing-focused events conducted in the central Susquehanna area of Union, Snyder, Northumberland, Montour, Columbia, and Lycoming Counties.

Begun in 1994 by Columbia County extension agent Dave Hartman, the meetings primarily offer a forum to pasture-based producers of meat, milk and

eggs, although the direct marketing topic of this meeting attracted vegetable producers as well.

Hartman is working to form a direct-marketing group for local farmers. According to a survey he conducted last year, about 20 people from the area are interested in a meat-marketing cooperative. Only about half of those, however, said they would be willing to spend time in organizing it. Hartman pointed out that a large amount of commitment is required to make such a cooperative work.

"Change is slow to come," Hartman said. "But there is a good niche for small producers."

In a related project, Callahan raised the possibility of a direct-marketer's map that would highlight all of the farms in the area who directly sell products. Referring to a similar map already published in Lehigh County, Callahan said such a map would provide the benefit of public association between producers.

"(The map) would put you in a group setting," he said. "It would allow you to market with

producers who are already marketing."

Callahan is working with the local Chamber of Commerce to develop the poster-sized map which would be displayed in various public locations around the area.

The map would be another tool for small-scale marketers to compete with large-scale food vendors, Callahan pointed out.

"Our products are fresh in a way (the supermarket's) will never be," he said.

The group discussed various other marketing tactics including a new producers-only market in Mifflinburg, marketing to tourists who come to the area for vacation, as well as word-of-mouth advertising through places of employment, friends and church.

Callahan said that the key to his own operation is a low-input approach to producing a final product that brings a premium price.

"I buy a healthy, cheap animal and raise it inexpensively," he said.

Callahan described how he purchases week-old Jersey calves

weaning age to slaughter at 18 to 22 months.

"I've seen them nibbling grass at a week old," Callahan said.

The calves consume about a 50-pound bag of milk replacer before weaning, at which point they become totally dependent on forage.

Part of the late fall and winter diet for the cattle consists of forage turnips that Callahan seeds

in the summertime. He also offers hay, either harvested from his own pastures or bought as needed.

At slaughter, a typical carcass will dress out 80 to 85 percent lean and between 400 and 500 pounds, Callahan said, most of which is ground into hamburger.

Callahan said he prefers the

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Bill Callahan feeds milk replacer to his latest batch of Jersey calves. He will raise the calves on a pasture-based program to an age of 18 to 22 months when they will be slaughtered and sold directly to consumers in the form of hamburger. Callahan buys the Jerseys from a dairy farmer at bargain prices when they are about a week old. "I buy a healthy, cheap animal and raise it inexpensively," he said. Callahan receives a premium price for the lean, grass-fed ground beef.

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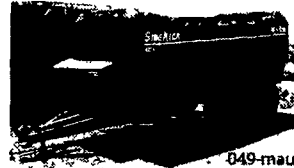
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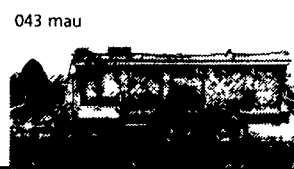
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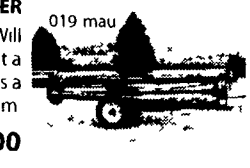
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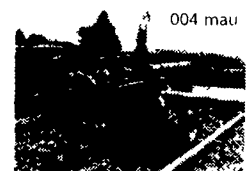
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