

Ag Secretary, Egg Executive Speak Out On Egg Safety

WHITEMARSH (Montgomery Co.) — It starts with the chick and results in a safer egg. That was the theme of an event here recently at Clemens Market to highlight PEQAP, the farm-to-fork Pennsylvania Egg Quality Assurance Program.

"Egg safety is especially important as we start a season of warm-weather activities and consumption of many eggs and egg-based foods, and it is especially timely as we hear about food safety concerns in other nations," said Paul D. Sauder, president, Sauder's Quality Eggs. "We want shoppers to look for the PEQAP seal so they can take advantage of our state's premier egg safety program."

Joining Sauder to promote PEQAP was Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Samuel E. Hayes. The department helped develop the program and supports PEQAP consumer education efforts.

"Most consumers know eggs are an economical source of important nutrients and part of a balanced diet. We want them to know that PEQAP eggs are produced with safety, as well as high quality and low price, in mind," Sauder noted.

Sauder, one of the founders of the PEQAP program, delivers 150 million dozen eggs a year to the northeastern U.S. market through supermarket chains and independent grocers. Sauder's is a Lancaster-based, family-owned business established in the 1930s.

To increase consumer awareness, Sauder's has erected PEQAP billboards along I-95 in the Philadelphia area, north of the Street Road exit and south of

the Allegheny Avenue exit, where they can be seen by hundreds of thousands of people each day.

"The consumer wins because through PEQAP, the industry and government are working together, tapping our expertise and resources to institute management practices that minimize Salmonella enteritidis contamination of chicken (shell) eggs," said Sauder.

Salmonella enteritidis may infect the ovaries of healthy-appearing hens and contaminate an egg before the shell is formed. People eating contaminated eggs that aren't properly prepared can suffer flu-like symptoms, usually within 12 to 72 hours after consumption. The illness usually lasts four to seven days and can be most serious for infants, the elderly, and those with impaired immune systems.

Launched in 1994, PEQAP is the nation's first egg safety program and is even more stringent than the federal program that



At Clemens Markets, from left, Paul Sauder, Sauder's Eggs; Julie Sollenberger, 2001 Pennsylvania Fair Queen; Sam Hayes, Pennsylvania secretary of agriculture; and Jack Clemens, Clemens Markets.

was proposed in 1999 and implemented in 2001.

"We know that food safety is high on the list of public concerns and believe the investment in the PEQAP process is well worth the cost for the added safety assurance," Sauder said. "And it's good business, since buying eggs with the PEQAP seal should be a consumer priority."

PEQAP addresses potential contamination in all the steps of egg production, from purchase of chicks through the refrigeration of the egg. To win the PEQAP seal, producers must follow best management practices, such as:

- Egg testing.
- Monitoring and testing of

chicks, pullets (young hens) and layers.

- Manure sampling and culturing.

- Biosecurity precautions at farms, such as biosecurity suits and disinfecting processes for visitors.

- Criteria for processing and packaging, including employee and package sanitation.

- Carton coding and record keeping.

- Rodent control.

About 22.5 million layer chickens are monitored under the program that was developed by the

state's Department of Agriculture with PennAg Industries Association and leaders of the egg and poultry industry. PEQAP also is supported by Penn State University, the University of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Animal Health Commission, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the federal Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

Consumers — who eat about three billion eggs a year in Pennsylvania, or 245 per person — can continue egg safety precautions with these storage and preparation steps:

- Buy eggs with the PEQAP symbol.

- Keep eggs refrigerated.

- Refrigerate cooked eggs and egg-containing foods.

- Don't undercook eggs (whites and yolks should not be runny).

- Wash hands thoroughly after handling raw foods, including eggs.

Also participating in the consumer education event at the Clemens were Jim Shirk, assistant vice president, PennAg Poultry Council, and Ron Hunsberger, Clemens store manager.

Pennsylvania is the nation's fourth largest egg producer (after Ohio, California, and Iowa), producing about 5.8 billion eggs annually for in-state consumption and export. Pennsylvania is the largest food processing state in the northeast and one of the only states with significant employment in most sectors of the food industry.

FORAGING AROUND

the newsletter of the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council (PFGC), includes several farm features with a focus on pasture quality.

The special summer section will be included with

Lancaster Farming July 14. Another section, the fall PFGC issue, is scheduled Sept. 15.

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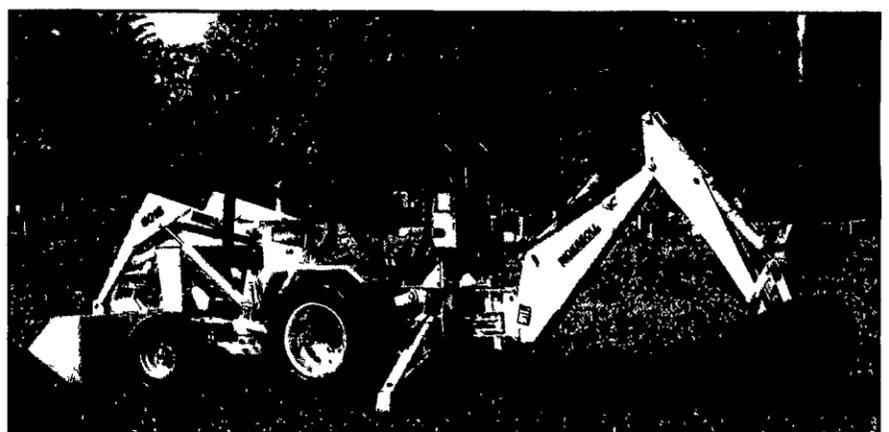


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