

'City Boy' Believes Education Calms Consumers' Fears

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Food And Family
Features Editor

RHEEMS (Lancaster Co.) — "I'm a city boy who's still trying to figure out how I got here," Andy Bradford said of his recent appointment as president of the Lancaster County Poultry Association.

Don't allow that statement to create the misconception that Bradford isn't qualified or doesn't enjoy the appointment. Since he was graduated with a degree in animal science from Penn State, Bradford has filled several different career positions for the poultry industry.

Now he is eager to tackle the concerns facing the industry. As president of the association, one of Bradford's main concerns is the misunderstandings that erupt between the agricultural and nonfarming community.

"People tend to fear what they can't see," Bradford said. He pointed out that the public often fears swine barns and large chicken houses because they cannot see inside of them, and therefore don't understand the need for the barns.

"We fear most what we can't understand. The more we can show the public what is actually happening, the more positive message we are portraying," Bradford said.

He has some ideas how communication can be improved. But first, a look into Bradford's background provides some perspective on his position.

While reviewing the signposts along his career path, Bradford said, "I guess you could say, everything happened in college."

The "city boy" had planned to become a veterinarian because he was always intrigued with animals and agriculture. One of the first professors he had at Penn State reminded the students that

less than one-half of those pursuing a veterinarian degree would achieve it. Bradford was told that an ag science degree would enable him to do anything a vet could do except prescribe medication.

At that time, a four-year degree seemed much more enticing than a long, rigorous course of veterinarian studies. But "chickens" was still a long way from his mind—except when he traveled to the Delmarva area to visit relatives.

Bradford said, "I fell in love with that area and admired the thriving poultry industry."

During Bradford's senior year at Penn State, he was elected president of the Poultry Science Club. After graduation, Bradford was employed by Pennfield Feeds for one and a half years. Immediately, he became active in the county poultry association and was soon appointed secretary of the board.

Bradford resigned from that position when he was offered a job as a broiler flock supervisor for Perdue in North Carolina. By this time, Andy had married Amy, who grew up on a beef farm and was active in 4-H.

He and his wife moved to North Carolina. But they missed Lancaster County, so when Pennfield offered him a position 10 months later, Bradford took it, and the couple returned to the county. Again, he became active in the poultry association.

Bradford soon jumped fields to become feed salesman for Wenger Feeds.

"I had nutrition classes in college and soon developed a knack for it," Bradford said of deciphering nutritional needs.

He works with independent layer customers — a dwindling number among poultry producers.

"We value independent grow-

ers. We believe in the family farm and want it to prosper," Bradford said. Independent producers are more inclined to drop out of the industry than contract growers who are guaranteed a paycheck, regardless of fluctuating prices. Bradford said that Wengers has nine million chickens under contract, compared to three-quarter million owned by independent growers.

"The ag industry has faced some tough times in the past 30 months, and many of the independent producers have been losing money," Bradford said.

He said the industry blames much of the tough times on the influx of eggs from the Midwest. The Midwest has an abundance of grain and build poultry complexes simply to use up the grain, even if they have not established markets for the eggs. This complicates the local market for eggs. Although grain is cheaper in the Midwest, transportation costs are higher, resulting in a more level playing field for local feed companies.

Bradford isn't certain how the Sept. 11 events will influence the egg industry. Although reports show fewer consumers are eating out and this reduces the volume sold to restaurants, recession often benefits the ag industry. During a recession, people pinch pennies and cook more at home. Eggs are a great source of protein and cost less than other protein sources.

Bradford said that he has enjoyed working with different aspects of the poultry industry. He believes his experience with working with broiler and egg production and with contract and independent growers enables him to grasp the complexity of the different problems each group faces.

"This county benefits from the strong support of industry and

growers for the poultry association," Bradford said. Although North Carolina has a bustling poultry industry, it does not have a local poultry association.

"Producers here can rely on the industry to fight in behalf of their best industries," Bradford said of legislative issues. "We are lucky to have people we do in positions such as PennAg. They look after everyone's benefit. It's important to see both sides of an issue. Without one, you do not have the other."

One benefit that North Carolina has that is not available in Pennsylvania is no sales tax for poultry equipment.

As president, Bradford would like to keep the focus of the organization which is to promote the products and educate consumers.

He believes in the need for continually building public relations with the community. Bradford is proud that the association provides and serves an annual dinner for patrons of Water Street Mission.

Bradford said that eggs were sent to aid in the relief effort at Ground Zero. Mark Lovett of Tyson Foods cooked nine million pounds of chicken for relief workers.

"It's tougher today to be in the industry because of all the legislative changes," Bradford said. "We went from not requiring a nutrient plan to a bureaucracy that is changing from nitrogen to phosphorous-based nutrient management. This is a disadvantage to animal agriculture."

Farming today requires keep-

ing up with the times and not putting our heads in the sand, Bradford said of the misunderstandings that develop between the ag and the non-ag population.

"It's important to listen to people's concerns and correct misconceptions without offending people. This is where education comes through," Bradford said of the association's educational thrust to consumers through seminars, educational dinners, and literature.

"It's important for the ag community to get involved and evaluate situations to see if it is an emotional or legitimate complaint," Bradford said of local government.

A beneficial way to stop misconceptions between farmers and community members, Bradford said, is to conduct tours. Recently, township supervisors were invited to tour a layer facility. An environmental coordinator explained the steps to ensure a safe environment. The township supervisors remarked that they were impressed with the facility. The supervisors discovered that environmental concerns were not as bad as what they had been led to believe by a small vocal opposition group.

Bradford believes that farmers in Lancaster County are better stewards of the land and adhere to belief in stewardship more than farmers in many other areas.

"We don't abuse what we have. And that puts Pennsylvania ahead of many other states," Bradford said.

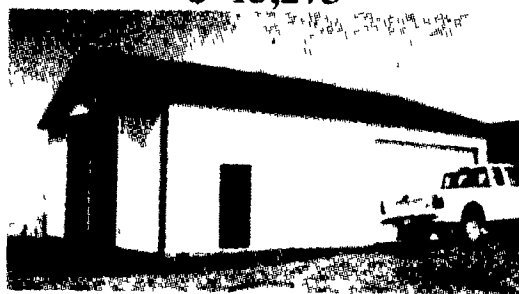


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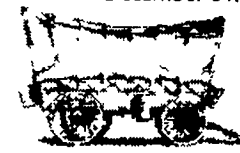
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