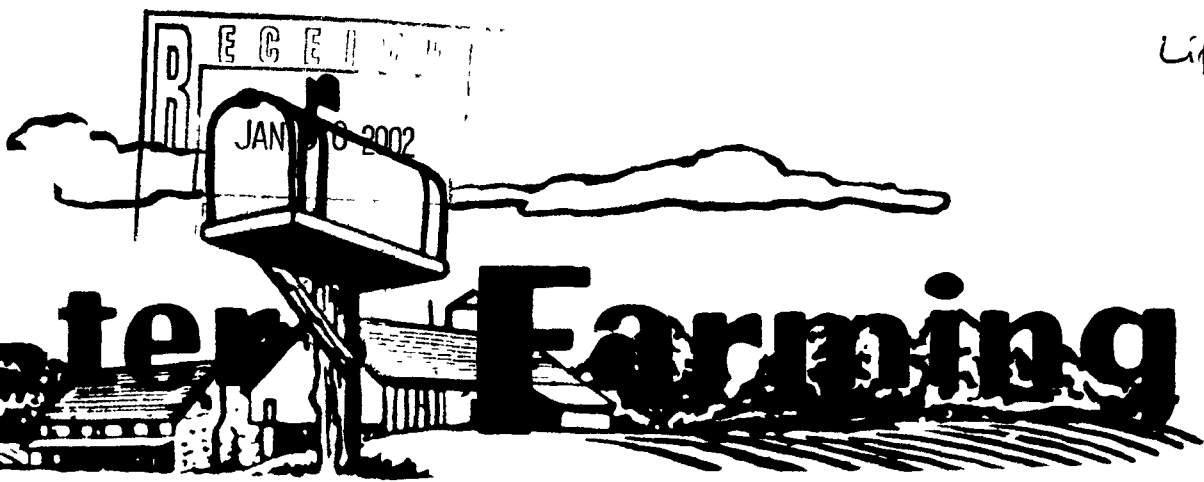


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James and Shirley Hershey are both lifetime farmers. The couple farms 350 acres and has a 3,400-head hog finishing unit and 120,000 broilers. With them is their dog, Pebbles. Read more about their operation in *Corn Talk* this issue.

Photo by Michelle Kunjappu

Survey Reveals Consumers Don't Understand Biotech

N.J. Vegetable Meeting Unveils Surprising Results

ANDY ANDREWS
Editor

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Less than half — only 41 percent — of Americans are aware that foods with biotech ingredients are on supermarket shelves, according to a recent survey.

And 75 percent of those polled rated their understanding of food production as "excellent," while only 5 percent rate their understanding as "poor," said Dr. William Hallman.

Hallman, associate director of the Food Policy Institute at Rutgers/Cook College, spoke about the public perception of ag biotechnology in the U.S. in 2001.

Hallman spoke to about 100 growers and agri-industry representatives Wednesday at the New Jersey Annual Vegetable Meeting at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City.

The survey, conducted in April last year through the institute, included 1,200 adults in a carefully constructed phone interview that addressed many biotech issues.

What they found: the American public is woefully uninformed about exactly what biotechnology means and its impact on how food is produced.

Hallman said of those interviewed (made up of half male and half female respondents), "Many people have a poor grasp of basic ecological and environmental concepts," he noted. Results pointed out: only half of those interviewed even heard

about traditional crossbreeding methods.

In the educational section of the testing, only 40 percent of Americans got seven or more out of nine questions to pass the test. One of the questions was: if a person eats genetically modified (GM) fruit, will they also be modified? The correct answer, false, was answered correctly by two-thirds of those polled. Yet on a similar question conducted in 2000 in Europe, only 40 percent answered correctly.

The answers from the true or false questions were "off the cuff," and typically showed the analysts, according to Hallman, that the respondents' opinions are "not well thought out, not strongly held, subject to change, and are heavily influenced by the wording of the question."

For those in the U.S., Hallman said, biotechnology is "an abstract concept for many. It's not high on the agenda, and they are not focused to make personal decisions about it."

Hallman noted one question, "for tomatoes genetically modified with the catfish gene, would they taste fishy?" The answer clearly is false, yet "one-third of the Americans were not sure if it was false," said Hallman.

The terms "GM," "biotechnology," and "genetic engineering" all refer to the effort to use technological methods to speed up traditional crossbreeding techniques to promote value-added or enhanced ag products.

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Va. Farm Show Scheduled In The Heart Of Shenandoah Valley

GAY BROWNLEE
Virginia Correspondent

FISHERSVILLE (Augusta County, Va.) — On Jan. 22-23 at Expoland, the 2002 Virginia Farm Show is set in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley, in proximity to much of the state's diverse farming operations, primarily poultry, beef, sheep, dairy, and horses.

The event also attracts attendance from producers in surrounding states.

"We did the show in Richmond several years and it was a good crop show," said Ken Maring, trade show manager for Lee Publications which owns and operates the show.

"But we couldn't draw farmers from the Shenandoah Valley

because it was a 2½-hour drive. On request from exhibitors," he said, "we moved the show to the Shenandoah Valley. It is a great location. The show encompasses all agriculture in Virginia."

The relocation means an advantage for eager farmers who are anticipating the opportunity to make comparisons between products that will run the gamut from machinery and equipment to heating and irrigation systems to recycling, chemicals, genetics, fertilizers, seeds, and so on.

On tap, also, will be a skid-steer rodeo.

"The new technology will get their brains going," commented Steve Saufley. Saufley represents six counties in the Virginia

State Farm Bureau Association and hopes the farmers will allow the concepts they see to enlarge the scope of ideas they hold about running their operations.

Speaking of new ideas, Mike and Susan Phillips from outside Broadway in Rockingham County will be fielding questions about a product they recently became acquainted with and are using themselves. It's called Bermudagrass.

Susan said they are well aware it will take a lot of convincing for Bermudagrass to catch on. Since the couple stepped out in faith to plant Bermudagrass (it does well in hot weather), they hope to prove something in the rotational

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Md. Teen Crowned Miss American Angus

MICHELLE KUNJAPPU
Lancaster Farming Staff

SYKESVILLE, Md. — Nov. 12 will always be an anniversary day for Cortney Hill-Dukehart. A sort of a second birthday, a day that marked a major event in her life.

On the last day of the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE), she was given the national title of Miss American Angus in Louisville, Ky.

A freshman at Howard Community College, Cortney, 18, is the daughter of Robert Hill and Marlene Dukehart, owners of 18-acre Sunrise Sunset Farm, Sykesville, Md.

"So far I've met so many people. I want to represent the Angus breed the best way I can," said Cortney.

To Compete

She began her quest for the crown by filling out a scholarship application. "You can only apply your graduating year of high school," she said. "You apply at your state auxiliary and then the winners are sent to the national auxiliary. From there, the top five scholarships are chosen and those five compete for Miss American Angus."

To compete in the contest, the three girls, applicants who had first won at state level, came

Saturday and filled in a three-page fill-in-the-blank and essay test about the Angus industry. The auxiliary had previously sent the girls a large packet of information for them to study, said Cortney.

A few weeks before the contest the girls received the topic for their five-to-seven minute public speech.

The speech was followed by a 20-minute interview with judge, and then an impromptu question in front of the public, where the girls answered why they would want to be Miss Angus America.

The American Angus Auxiliary
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Newly-crowned Miss American Angus Cortney Hill-Dukehart, Sykesville, Md., stands at the halter of Savannah, one of her show ring heifers.

Photo by Michelle Kunjappu