

Gov. Rendell Urged To Support Classroom Standards For Agriculture Studies

PHILADELPHIA — An alliance of organizations representing Pennsylvania agriculture urged Gov. Ed Rendell to support adoption of a state curriculum standard for teaching about modern agriculture and informing students about careers related to agriculture and the food industry.

Rendell joined with a statewide Agricultural Education Coalition for a celebration of National FFA Week at the Walter Biddle Saul High School, an event which also included Pennsylvania's Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff.

"Everyone benefits when our children learn about food production and know about exciting career opportunities in the vast industry related to agriculture," said Michael Pechart, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's director of local government affairs. "Guide-

lines for teaching about agriculture are buried in other curriculum requirements and need to be established as separate curriculum standards."

Greeted by hundreds of FFA members and agriculture representatives, Rendell and Wolff were provided a tour of the agricultural sections of W.B. Saul High School, which has the largest FFA chapter in the northeastern U.S.

The Agriculture Education Coalition consists of the Pennsylvania Association of Agricultural Educators, Pennsylvania Young Farmers Association, Agriculture Awareness Foundation, PennAg Industries Association, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Franklin County Farm Bureau, Penn State University Agricultural and Education Extension, the Council of Farm Organizations, and the Pennsylvania FFA Association.



Gov. Edward Rendell, center right, joined Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff and the State FFA Officer team at W.B. Saul High School in Philadelphia to celebrate National FFA Week.

Pa. Certified Organic Celebrates 6 Years

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — In an event that showcased product integrity, diversity, and environmental stewardship, Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO) conducted its annual meeting at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex Jan. 22.

Executive Director Leslie Zuck underscored the organization's accomplishments throughout the course of the past year. She noted that PCO was one of about 28 U.S. certifiers to be accredited by the USDA.

In addition to implementing existing National Organic Standards, PCO has played an active role in shaping and defining forthcoming policy, Zuck said. Zuck serves on a steering committee of the Organic Trade Association, which helps different national certifying agencies maintain uniformity.

PCO's Materials Team in 2002 published a list of substances that are allowed or prohibited in an organic system. PCO also published a list of organic seed and seedling resources.

Zuck emphasized that Pennsylvania consumers are fortunate to have diverse organic food choices. She pointed out the vast array of organic products that had been provided by attendees of the meeting, which ranged from

beets, eggs, mushrooms, and pretzels to flour, apple pies, and calf feed.

Zuck underscored the importance of strengthening the connection between the growers and the consumers. To achieve this, PCO will endeavor to increase the availability of regional organic food by publishing resources for consumers and by working with farmers markets, growers' cooperatives, community supported farms, and the internet.

Representatives from PCO's committees also spoke at the annual meeting. President Mike Brownback reminisced that in 1996, visionary organic farmers and processors had met at the Farm Show Complex to organize and start PCO. In 2003, PCO is both a USDA-accredited certifying agent and is internationally accredited to perform certification services.

Alfred Walker, PCO Certification Committee Chair, reported that PCO certified 251 operations in 2002, including more than 200 organic field crop farms, 35 processor-handlers, 16 farmer-processors, 84 dairy farms, 96 vegetable growers, 25 poultry producers, 18 other livestock farms, maple syrup operations, and mushroom producers. Walker also stressed that PCO has the

opportunity to help to further define some of the forthcoming livestock standards, such as poultry outdoor access, on the national level.

Jeff Moyer, co-chair of the education committee, stressed that organic farmers are the best educators when they talk to their customers. He introduced a new website sponsored by the Rodale Institute: www.newfarm.org.

Other organizations represented at the annual meeting included the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA).

Brian Snyder, PASA executive director, outlined some of the common goals of both organizations, ranging from political action to supporting concerns of individual farmers and consumers. According to Snyder, cooperation between PASA and PCO serves to strengthen the missions of both the organizations and their supporters.

Anyone who is interested in becoming a member or learning more about organic certification is encouraged to contact PCO at (814) 364-1344 or info@paorganic.org.

Certification information and organic standards are available at www.paorganic.org or by contacting PCO.

Northern Tier Offers Dairy/Grain Teleconference

TOWANDA (Bradford Co.) and WELLSBORO (Tioga Co.) — Penn State Cooperative Extension in Bradford and Tioga Counties will host a Dairy/Grain Outlook Tele-Conference March 6 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Via television, Lou Moore and Ken Bailey will be discussing the outlook for dairy, grain, and the general economy. Phil Plourd, a dairy futures broker and consultant from Wisconsin will discuss the dairy outlook, with particular emphasis on what is going on at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange with Class III contracts.

Participants at each session will have an opportunity to ask questions.

To register for the Tioga County tele-conference, call the extension office at (570) 724-9120 to register. The conference will take place at the Tioga County FSA Office.

To register for the Bradford County event, call the extension office at (570) 265-2896. The conference will be conducted at the Bradford County Extension Office.

At both locations, a \$3 pizza lunch will be available at 11:30 a.m.

Organic Certification Workshop Set

BIRD-IN-HAND (Lancaster Co.) — Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO) will host a spring meeting and certification workshop on Wednesday, March 5. The meeting will take place from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Bird-in-Hand Family Inn and Restaurant, Bird-In-Hand.

The meeting and workshop are free, and will provide information on how to write an organic system plan or update, where to apply for cost-share funds, and what crop, livestock, and handling practices are acceptable for organic production.

Workshop participants will receive sample recordkeeping forms, National Organic Standards, allowed and prohibited materials lists, organic system plans, and other forms.

A question and answer session will take place.

For more information, contact Pennsylvania Certified Organic, 1919 General Potter Highway, Centre Hall, PA 16828, (814) 364-1344, info@paorganic.org.

Certification Information and Organic Standards can be found at www.paorganic.org or by contacting the PCO Office.

A Look At The Economic Advantages Of Polled Cattle

Fred Hendricks
SunShower Acres
Longmont, Colo.

Incorporating polled genetics in your breeding program results in fewer calves that require dehorning. While this fact may seem elementary, few dairy farmers contemplate the economic advantages. Most often farmers respond with "dehorning is part of our routine operation, so it's not an important factor."

Breeding a typical dairy herd to polled bulls results in a minimum 50 percent hornless calves. In just one generation, a herd can become half polled. The polled gene is dominant and needs to be present in only one parent.

While dehorning may be a routine operation on most dairy farms, there are significant costs associated with dehorning. These costs vary a great deal, depending on the size of dairy, personnel employed to do the dehorning, and equipment utilized. The most difficult cost to ascertain is the setback a calf goes through resulting from dehorning.

Reid Hoover, Hoover Farms, Lebanon, indicates his dehorning

costs to be \$10 per head on young calves and up to \$20 per head on older calves. "Equipment and labor are the costs involved. When they are older, it sets them back, and you lose growth and efficiency," said Hoover.

Hoover said, "These costs and the time factor to do this job well have made me think about using polled bulls. We have used a few and have liked the results with polled calves."

Enhanced Efficiency

Lonny Ward, manager of BYU Dairy, Spanish Fork, Utah, tags their dehorning costs at about \$2 per head. "This figure does not calculate a cost for the setback losses, because there is too much variation in those costs."

Ward points out that polled cattle enhance their dairy's efficiency. "To survive in the dairy industry today, you have to be as efficient as possible. Any time you can eliminate a cost without a negative consequence, you are better off. Dehorning is an area where improvements can be made genetically to eliminate a labor cost and stress on the animal. If we can integrate the

polled gene into the Holsteins without losing in other areas, we will have taken a step forward."

Iv-Ann Holsteins, Minister, Ohio, indicates the setback to their calves is their biggest cost. "In our opinion, the cost of dehorning is very hard to quantify since we do our own work. However, we think our biggest cost is the setback in the growth of the animal caused by the dehorning trauma."

Ivo Osterloh, owner of Iv-Ann Holsteins, said "The cost is not the only factor we consider in our use of polled bulls. Dehorning is not a very pleasant job—and very often it is delayed too long."

Origin Of Polled Dairy Cattle

Polled Holstein Historian Dr. Larry Specht, professor emeritus of Penn State, noted "The history books tell us that the ancestors of our modern cattle did not have horns, and that mutations must have occurred that gave rise to horns. Horned cattle proliferated, and it is now thought that the occurrence of polled animals in modern times is the result of another mutation back to the hornless condition."

Horns served a useful purpose

prior to cattle being domesticated. They were a defense mechanism and served to survive the species. In some countries, farmers tether their cattle by the horns. In modern dairy farm operations, horns have no purpose—therefore the practice of dehorning.

While it is not clear when polled cattle began appearing in U.S. dairy cattle, Specht found the earliest recorded polled bull in the Holstein Association herdbook to be born April 22, 1889. Various breeders propagated the polled gene over time to where the polled gene now occurs far more frequently in today's dairy cattle herds.

In his Bouic Polled Holstein Newsletter, Frank Bouic reports "There are over 25 polled Holstein bulls in AI, including proven bulls, sires-in-waiting, and sample sires."

Bouic noted "The genetics available in the polled segment of the Holstein breed is improving rapidly, in some cases approaching the best of the Holstein breed. The Burket-Falls, East Freedom, Pennsylvania (Dave Burket Family) and Hickorymea, Airville,

Pennsylvania (T. Edwin Johnson Family) herds in particular have contributed to the supply of AI bulls."

The polled gene has been present in Red and White dairy cattle for many years. Therefore, the Red and White population has a significantly large selection of polled red and white carrier bulls.

Second-generation polled Jersey breeder Paul Chittenden, Dutch Hollow Farm, Schodack Landing, N.Y. indicates that his father, Stanley Chittenden, bought his first polled Jersey in 1952. The Chittendens have been leading breeders of polled Jersey cattle ever since. The Dutch Hollow prefix can be found on several proven sires in AI.

The polled gene is also well documented in both the Ayrshire and Milking Shorthorn breeds.

In conclusion, utilizing the polled gene is easier than ever before with additional sires available through AI. The financial savings through labor, time, equipment, and sustained growth of the animal can be substantial. And a herd can be converted to poll in short order with polled being dominant.