

Council Of Farm Organizations Hosts Meeting, Discussion, Reception

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versity of Pennsylvania, presented "Our Food: How Safe and Secure Is It?"

Although there is "absolutely no question" that today's food supply in America is the safest "the world has ever known," according to Aceto. "I have heard of agriculture described as 'the soft underbelly of homeland security.'"

"If we don't supply a safe product, that affects consumer confidence" and eventually marketability, she said.

"A country's reputation in terms of ability to export... is very much dictated" by disease reports and disease status, noted Aceto.

She said that microbial contamination from various kinds of bacteria is "far and away the number one problem with food contamination." Second is naturally-occurring toxicants, and third is environmental contaminants.

Consequently, "as long as we can cook and clean our food properly, we'll all be fine," she said.

With the increased mobility of not only humans but also products, diseases pose a greater threat of spread.

There are two million intercepted illegal products per year, she said. It is "a miracle" that a disease such as foot-and-mouth has not entered the U.S. yet, according to Aceto.

"Everyone in agriculture is on the front line," in prevention, protection, and response.

"You are protecting 13 percent of the gross domestic product," she said, pointing out that agriculture industry is America's big-

gest employer, at 16.9 percent employment.

"The potential of disease being introduced onto a dairy farm is very high" because of the amount of animal movement on and off the farm, and lack of management practices such as quarantining animals.

Aceto also discussed the value



Dr. Helen Aceto, Ph.D., VMD, spoke about the safety of America's food supply.



Chris Herr, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, was a roundtable discussion panel member.

of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) — the integration of digital maps — for agriculture. Digital maps can simulate disease spread, such as an avian influenza outbreak.

"There are some powerful things we can do with modeling," she said, noting that maps could, for example, help with strategic vaccination.

Laura England, director of communications for Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association, updated the council on four dairy promotion organizations that cover Pennsylvania. Two years ago the groups began a campaign to maintain and grow consumer confidence in dairy products, according to England.

"We've been sharing what we've learned and developed with others (various agricultural groups), because we realize that we all need to work together," she said.

The effort included educating mothers, leaders of the dairy industry, and "newsmakers" such as legislators and key industry groups.

As part of the campaign, organizers developed third-party spokespeople and trained industry representatives in crisis preparedness and communication.

A scientific advisory panel, "a group of experts that we can go to with questions" or serve as spokespeople has also been developed, according to England.

This year's focus includes issues crisis management, media relations, and a health professionals network, she said.

Because of the work in the media, "we have a great ability" to counter negative media, which has shown little impact on consumer behavior, because "they still believe in dairy health benefits," she said.

"If we do this for dairy, it can translate into all of agriculture. We're certainly willing to help," she said.

"With our continued preparedness, we feel that we're there, we're ready to step up" in the face of a disease crisis, said England.

An industry Website, www.dairyresponse.com, delivers basic information about diseases and provides suggestions on how to speak about animal health and dairy product safety.

Andy Zemba, executive assistant, officer of water management, Department of Environmental Protection, was also a panel member.

Chris Herr, Department of Agriculture, was also a panel member. Biosecurity, he said, is "an issue we have been able to address in many different ways" by enhancing programs already in place and networking with such federal organizations such as the



Laura England, director of communications for Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association, discussed "Managing Dairy's Image."

INS and FBI.

Pennsylvania, with its lab systems, research projects, and networked contacts, is a leader in reaction to disease, according to Herr.

"Blowing up buildings is a scenario we're used to," said Herr. However bioterrorism, he said, is "a very serious issue that we will continue to plan for."

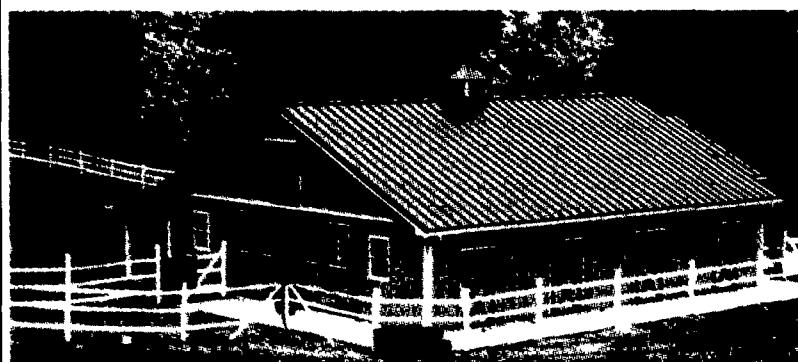
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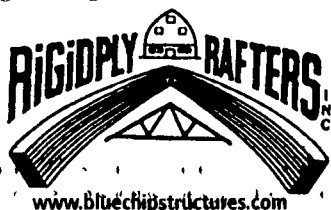
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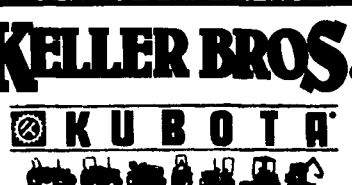
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