

Dairy-A-PhAIR Addresses Phosphorus, Air Quality

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CONESTOGA (Lancaster Co.)

— A group of 17 producers, speakers, and agriculture industry representatives gathered this week at the Frey Dairy Farm, Conestoga for "Dairy-A-PhAIR," a course designed to address phosphorus and Air quality.

Penn State Dairy Alliance sponsored the event.

Robb Meinen, Penn State, discussed the Pennsylvania Environmental Agricultural Conservation Certification of Excellence (PEACCE) program.

Following an environmental awareness course, an on-farm assessment and Environmental Review, and a conservation district checklist, producers can be certified in the program.

In addition, he discussed odor and manure application. Pennsylvania's nutrient management plans are based on nitrogen; however, future plans will include phosphorus, he said.

"Ten percent of the land contributes 90 percent of the Phosphorus that enters our waters," said Meinen. "The phosphorus Index allows us to identify that ten percent of the land."

Carissa Itle Westrick, dairy environmental consultant, dis-

cussed the correlation between agriculture and the Clean Air Act.

In the past, said Westrick, water quality and proper permit inspections were complaint driven, since "if you have an odor problem, you have a neighbor problem," she said.

Now, inspections are becoming increasingly routine.

In 2000 a large hog farm in Missouri was sued under the Clean Air Act (CAA), causing producers to look carefully at the link between the CAA and their farms. However "the science is just not there yet to regulate agriculture under CAA," she said.

Although odor and air quality "must be lumped together so odor can be regulated and enforced, from a producer standpoint, I do think it's two different issues," she said.

"For Pennsylvania, air quality concerns are likely to be odor driven, with most pressure coming in areas of suburban sprawl," said Westrick. "Make your neighbors happy, and it will return back to you ten-fold."

Alyssa Dodd, extension associate at Penn State, addressed nutrient management requirements.

Nutrient-related regulations in Pennsylvania include the Clean

Streams Law, the Nutrient Management Act, and the Federal Clean Water Act.

Dodd also discussed the shifting focus to phosphorus. "Changing science reveals that dissolved phosphorus in runoff is immediately available" and "is not just sediment-bound," said Dodd.

Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Act regulations, which became effective in 1997, are under review.

Dodd encouraged producers to participate in government activities and help shape policy. "This is an active time in Pennsylvania," she said, reminding the audience that their comments and concerns must be addressed, and "it does make a difference."

To read about nutrient management regulations, a manual is available through local conservation districts.

Roy Richardson, PDA, discussed the Plan Development Incentives Program, Agri-Link Low Interest Loans, Plan Implementation Grant Program, and Growing Greener Grants, state-funded programs to fund best management practices (BMPs).

Federal sources for BMPs include the Chesapeake Bay Program and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program



Tom Frey, owner and president of Frey Dairy Farms, discusses the operation's nutrient management with the help of a farm diagram.

(EQIP).

Funding for streambank fencing may come through the DEP, Ducks Unlimited, Pennsylvania Game Commission, or Agriculture Management Assistance Program (AMA).

Meinen also discussed manure storage management. He defined "freeboard," the area above the maximum engineered holding capacity, as an area usually designed to hold a 25 year, 24-hour storm event.

"Breaching freeboard without a major storm event could be considered negligent management," he said.

Besides installing new storage units to hold liquid capacity for storms, Meinen advised keeping weekly records such as leak detection, rain gauge measurement, and liner integrity, among others.

Local contacts for finding out the availability of funds include the Conservation District, USDA Service Centers, Watershed Associations, State Conservation Commission, and PDA.

Virginia Ishler, Penn State, discussed four departments with information on nutrient management.

A web user can find the departments' information at <http://nutrient.psu.edu/>.

News, key contacts, information on the Phosphorus Index, a self-test, website user survey, and animal units calculator are also included.

Jerry Martin, who works with

the nutrient management education program for Penn State extension, discussed the phosphorus index. The index, which measures each field's ability to handle nutrients, takes into consideration source factors (How is it applied? Are the nutrients incorporated? What time of year is it applied?) and transport factors (how much erosion does the field sustain? What are the runoff levels? Is there subsurface drainage?).

These factors, and others, are combined in an equation to yield a number on a scale of 100. Top-scoring fields would be barred from further fertilization, according to Martin.

However, changing factors — such as adding a buffer or changing the time of application from fall to spring — may lower the field's score and allow more fertilizer application.

"It's not trying to eat the system but improve things," he said. The phosphorus index "Encourages those improvements along the way."

Tom Frey, owner, Frey Dairy Farms, discussed the dairy's nutrient management operation. The dairy includes two freestall barns, 600 stalls each, and almost 1,300 Holsteins that are milked three times a day.

The older milking parlor is still in use for fresh and treated cows, said Frey. The older barns are

(Turn to Page A26)



Speakers at the recent Dairy-A-PhAIR include, from left, Tom Frey, Frey Dairy Farms, and Penn State representatives Virginia Ishler, Jerry Martin, Alyssa Dodd, and Robb Meinen.

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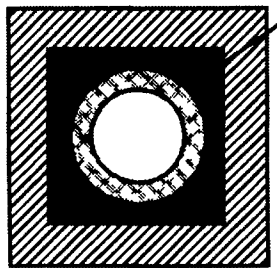
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