

PDMP Members Learn How To Develop Better Relationships

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — More than 100 producers and agribusiness representatives from across the state learned tips on how to do a better job presenting the true picture of agriculture to the public and lawmakers at the recent membership meeting conducted by the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania.

The day-long event, titled “Neighbors, Regulations, and Political Awareness,” was conducted at Mercer Vu Farms, Inc., in Mercersburg. Members and guests had the opportunity to hear, first-hand, from farm operators Ron, Judy, Rick, and Rod Hissong about their successful efforts to raise political and community awareness as they doubled their herd and improved facilities on their 950-cow operation, located within the town limits.

Rick and Rod Hissong discussed the pro-active steps they took to inform the public about their proposed expansion, which began in 2001. “We had to work around community misconceptions about large farms and thought the best way to educate the public would be to create a website,” explained Rod Hissong. As the expansion was under way, the site detailed the history of the family-owned farm, facts about the project, and nutrient control plans.

Today, the site (www.mercervufarms.com) shows the completed expansion and the economic impact the farm has on the local economy.

“The Website helped control rumors and has been an easy and effective way to reach the public,” said Hissong. “It shows them that a farm is just like any other business.”

Amy Van Blarcom-Lackey with PennAg Industries Association and Pat Wood of the public relations firm of William J. Green and Associates also shared how producers and agribusiness can raise awareness about agriculture through better public relations.

In her talk, titled “Political Process: Access to Power,” Van Blarcom-Lackey warned that legislation aimed at curtailing the swine industry is now targeting the dairy industry. Currently, she noted approximately 42 townships in Pennsylvania have or are considering ordinances to stop expansion of modern agriculture facilities. “Our industry must show officials this is an economic issue, not just an environmental one,” she explained.

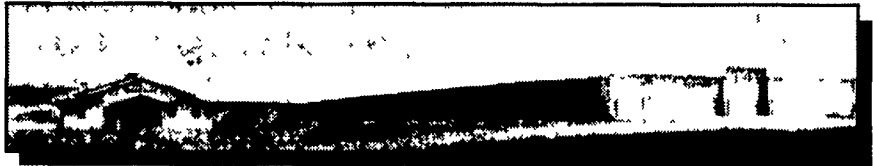
She urged members to take steps to educate the public and their leaders about current issues. “Today, fewer people are connected to agriculture

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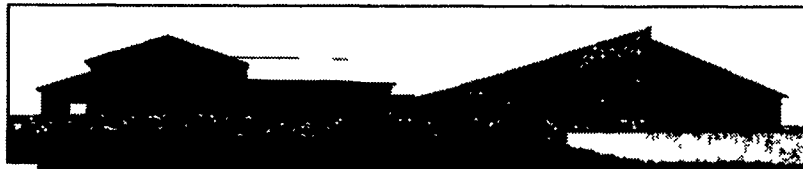
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