

Farmers Air Concerns

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Dr. Phil Stone introduced U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte, (Va.-6th). Goodlatte chairs the House Agriculture Committee.

"Nobody in Congress is more attentive to the needs of agriculture," said Stone.

Congressman Goodlatte went straight to the heart of the blows dealt to agriculture in recent times, not only to Shenandoah Valley farmers but those beyond. Hurricane Isabels unleashed devastation was the most recent disaster in a sequence of misfortunes to hit the industry. Add flash floods, ice, snow, avian influenza, low dairy prices, and a drought.

Yet, when they are compared to those of other countries, U.S. farming operations are proved the most efficient and productive. Goodlatte reported that while only two percent of the U.S. population is active in farm production, U.S. households overall are able to buy all their food for a mere nine percent of total income.

So between surplus production and exports balance becomes an issue. Agriculture in the area of the U.S. trade surplus is a tremendously important issue to American farmers and ranchers.

"Its important to negotiate, but agriculture should be at the forefront," Goodlatte said, alluding to trade talks.

Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jim Moseley said he is concerned about homeland security, because the terrorism conflict is different than all others we have dealt with in the world. He said the nature of it is very complex, however, and each citizen has to take some responsibility for its prevention.

"What you do as an agriculture operation is your decision," he said, but reminded everyone in the room about their proximity to the nations Capitol.

Location is one reason farmers and ranchers in the west arent as worried about their operations. The miles existing between Washington and themselves are perceived as a security zone.

Moseley indicated that in order to do its job right, the U.S. Department of Agriculture must find new and better ways to fulfill its function.

"The Department of Agriculture is there to try to change things," Moseley said. "We must change with the changes. We want to listen. Help us."

Undersecretary for Food Safety Elsa Murano drew smiles from

the audience in describing herself an educator, researcher, and college professor disguised as a bureaucrat, then turned serious about her topic.

"Food safety is important because we are all consumers," she said.

Two years ago when she came to Washington, Murano said she didnt realize that politics played such a part in food safety.

Policies must be based on scientific research.

"The challenge is to communicate food safety to the public," she said. "We need to think of ourselves as a link in a chain."

She cited statistics about the increased number of USDA food inspectors at food processing plants every day.

One question is: should the producers themselves have some responsibility for the safety of their product? Murano said producers now, more than ever, are being encouraged to reduce or eliminate human pathogens. She said guidelines are being prepared that will support this effort.

"We are trying to assess vulnerability and plug the holes," she said.

Food in some cases is infected because mistakes are being made at the time of preparation. Perhaps the person preparing it failed to wash their hands. Perhaps the utensils being used arent clean. Perhaps the food was not refrigerated promptly.

The other crucial aspect about food safety is countries can use it as a tool in trade negotiations.

The Chief Agriculture Negotiator from the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) Allen Johnson discussed needing to find markets for this countrys agriculture as the industry continues to become more and more efficient.

The scope of agriculture is very great. In trade negotiations, when it comes to bringing about implementation, and then making sure whatever has been agreed upon can also be enforced, there are challenges.

"You cant assume a country is going to do what it is supposed to do," he said.

A case in point is Russia with regard to U.S. poultry. That experience hit home in Goodlatte's district, where Rockingham County, poultry production leader, is located.

Around the globe there are



Following a question-and-answer session at the 2003 Agriculture Conference, Teresa Glass of Rockbridge County and Bill Joseph, general manager of the Shenandoah Valley Livestock Market, discuss their concerns about horses. During the session, one question concerned the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act.

other issues, however, in trade negotiations with other countries. The Trade Promotion Authority can exercise its authority, Johnson said.

"The USDA and USTR work together," Johnson said. "We work very hard to get the very best deal for U.S. agriculture. United States farmers are very efficient. The other side is not. They get very nervous about that."

During audience participation dairy farmer, Sidney Grove, expressed concern about the pricing collapse for dairy farmers. He pointed out there is an increasing flow of dairy into the country when prices are at an historically low levels. Then the farmer has to turn to the Farm Bill to get help for the farmer.

"Sometimes it seems our actions are counterproductive," he said. "USDA has been part of the problem."

According to Goodlatte, the problem is caused by the production of milk protein concentrates. He said that policies right now favor nonfat dried milk, and the program has to be adjusted to the demand.

Teresa Glass, a horse industry producer, wanted to discuss the Horse Slaughter Prevention Acts impact on the industry.

Another person wondered about having greater flexibility with regard to how people use re-



Steve Saufley, beef farmer, right, has a moment to consult with U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte, the House Agriculture Committee chairperson. Saufleys concern is youth migrating away from the farm.

tirement accounts when it comes to farm preservation.

That was a topic that interested the congressman greatly, although he said that sort of thing becomes part of a larger legislative process. He definitely wants more input on the subject.

Marlin Burkholder has a small farming operation. He asked, what is being done to improve the situation for animal waste disposal for small producers?

He was told about the creation of energy incentives to get animals to slaughter facilities.

Youth are leaving family farms for good and that is Steve Saufleys big concern.



Chief Agriculture Negotiator from the Office of the United States Trade Representative, Allen Johnson, right, talks with Matt Leggett at the 2003 Agriculture Conference. The event for Shenandoah Valley farmers was conducted at the Bridgewater College.

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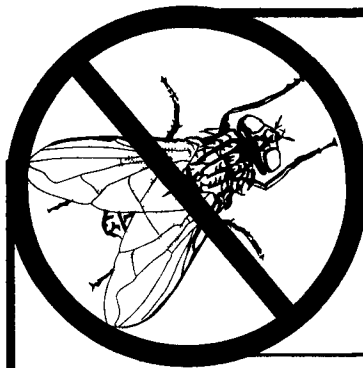
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