

DEP Brings Together Watershed Partners, State And Federal Agencies

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Deputy Secretary for Water Management Cathy Curran Myers today announced that the department convened a new steering committee of watershed partners and state and federal agencies to oversee the state's efforts to reduce nutrient and sediment loadings to the Chesapeake Bay.

"Pennsylvania is committed to doing its part to restore the Chesapeake Bay," Deputy Secretary Myers said. "More than one-half of the Bay's fresh water flows from the Susquehanna River. By reducing the nutrients and sediments that flow into our local streams, we will provide even greater benefits to the crabs and oysters in the Chesapeake Bay and the region that enjoys the Bay's bounty. Ultimately, this will benefit our Commonwealth as well. We will extend habitat for the American shad to return to the headwaters of the Susquehanna River, restoring this great fishery to Pennsylvania."

Pennsylvania has embraced the Chesapeake Bay Program for 20 years and has made great strides toward reaching water quality and living resource goals. With the signing of the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, Pennsylvania committed to removing the Chesapeake Bay from the federal Clean Water Act's list of impaired waters by 2010.

Partners to this commitment include all the jurisdictions in the Chesapeake watershed — Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, New York, Virginia, West Virginia, District of Columbia. The agreement describes an ambitious process for achieving the task, the cornerstone of which is completion of basin-specific nutrient and sediment reduction tributary strategies by April 2004.

Thirteen Watershed Teams within Pennsylvania's Chesapeake basin will develop the components of the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy. DEP organized the Watershed Teams to facilitate local watershed management planning efforts.

The teams, with help from local governments and citizens, will develop Tributary Strategies from the "bottom up." The strategies will identify Best Management Practices (BMPs) to address nonpoint source nutrient and sediment loadings and the most cost-effective approach to reduce point source nutrient loadings from wastewater treatment plants and industrial waste dischargers.

The Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy Steering Committee will support the Watershed Teams by identifying existing and needed resources to ensure implementation, and to assist with the tracking of actual nutrient and sediment reductions. In addition to numerous state and federal agencies, key watershed partners on the committee include the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts.

OARDC Researchers Lead Fight Against Chicken Virus

WOOSTER, Ohio — In the world of poultry diseases, viruses aren't chicken. And among poultry viruses, not many are as problematic as the infectious bursal disease virus (IBDV), which has troubled egg and broiler operations in Ohio and the rest of the United States for decades and now threatens to hit the industry even harder.

"Infectious bursal disease virus is a major concern," said molecular biologist Daral Jackwood, a researcher with the Food Animal Health Research Program (FAHRP) at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) in Wooster. "Layers are more susceptible to the virus than broilers, but they both get it."

The second-leading cause of viral disease in chickens, IBDV is an immuno-suppressive disease that attacks young birds, killing them or making them more susceptible to other infectious agents. Discovered in the United States in the late 1950s, the virus favors chickens younger than 7 weeks old, which have immature immune cells. IBDV replicates in and destroys those cells.

"This is a big economic problem," said Jackwood, who has 20 years of experience studying the virus. "Immuno-suppressed birds

have more respiratory and enteric (intestinal) diseases, grow slowly, and do not respond to vaccinations for other diseases. Infected flocks have a higher mortality rate."

Jackwood's research focuses on the many new strains of the virus that have proliferated in the United States and pose the highest risk to the industry. He developed and patented two commercially available tests for quick detection of these variant viruses and is now conducting an epidemiology study to inventory IBDV strains present in the nation.

"The vaccines developed for classic IBDV don't protect chickens from these new strains, which mutate rapidly," Jackwood explained. "The technology we developed is allowing us to test numerous virus samples in order to identify different variants of the virus based on their genetic sequences. Our tests allow us to identify viruses very quickly, within about an hour after we start the reaction. Traditional test took two days."

The inventory will let the U.S. poultry industry know which viruses are most prevalent, where in the country they are present, and how dangerous they are. It will also provide vital information for the development of vaccines for use on a national or re-

gional basis. Jackwood said companies are already considering some of the viruses he has found as possible vaccine candidates.

"Deciding whether or not to vaccinate is a question producers are wrestling with," he added. "Many of them don't bother (to vaccinate) because the old vaccines are not working for these new variants."

FAHRP's leadership in IBDV research has made it the only facility in the nation authorized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to study an even more powerful version of the disease: the very virulent infectious bursal disease virus (vvIBDV). Reported first in Europe in 1989, this aggressive virus has not reached the United States — but it has made it as close as the Dominican Republic.

"We're concerned because this is a virus that can kill 70-80 percent of a flock," said FAHRP chair Mo Saif, whose lab has received vvIBDV strains from Europe and Asia. "We analyzed these strains to see how they relate to classic and variant IBDV and developed a test to differentiate them from other viruses. So if we get hit with the disease, we are now in the position to come up with a diagnosis within 24 hours."

Record Soybean Exports For Third Year In A Row

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — World demand for soybeans remains strong. U.S. soybean exports reached record levels for the third year in a row, thanks in part to U.S. soybean farmer investments in checkoff-funded international marketing activities.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. exported more than one billion bushels of soybeans this past marketing year. And in the current marketing year, the record-setting pace of U.S. soybean exports continues.

"International marketing programs funded by the soybean checkoff played a crucial role in increasing U.S. soybean exports," said United Soybean Board (USB) International Marketing

Chair Criss Davis, a soybean farmer from Shullsburg, Wis. "The checkoff helped to develop an effective new strategic export plan to keep U.S. soybean exports growing despite dramatic increases in global soy production."

Factors such as global competition and decreased U.S. soybean planting projections for the next several years led soybean checkoff farmer-leaders to develop strategies to increase the value of U.S. soy exports and U.S. soybean farmer share of targeted export markets.

According to Davis, the growth of U.S. soybean sales to China demonstrates how the new export strategy has been effective. China, the largest customer for

U.S. soybeans, imported more than 282 million bushels.

The European Union imported more than 209 million bushels of U.S. soybeans this past marketing year, making it the largest regional customer of U.S. soy.

Once again, Canada is the top customer of U.S. soybean meal, purchasing the equivalent of more than 48 million bushels. Mexico bought the most U.S. soybean oil, importing the equivalent of more than 36 million bushels of U.S. soybeans, a 48 percent increase over last year.

"We export close to half of our entire soybean crop, so these soybean checkoff-funded export activities remain vital to keeping me and other U.S. soybean farmers competitive," said Davis.

Upswing In Soybean Prices Benefits Growers

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio soybean growers who managed to weather the lashings Mother Nature gave their crop in the form of rain and diseases are reaping the benefits of record yields and high harvest prices.

Because of a national shortage of soybeans, due to a significant decline in production in western states such as Nebraska, Missouri and Iowa coupled with continued consumer and export demands harvest prices have rallied over the past three months from \$5.50 a bushel to nearly \$8.00 a bushel.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, market year average price is projected between \$6.05 and \$6.95 per bushel, up from \$5.53 in 2002. With such promising soybean prices, Ohio growers, who are seeing projected record yields of 42 bushels per acre, are poised for a stellar grand finale.

"It's really an interesting reversal from last year. There was a short crop in Ohio, while growing conditions were nearly perfect out West. So while prices did increase, Ohio was not in a position to take advantage of that because we did not have large yields," said Matt Roberts, an Ohio State University agricultural economist. "But this year, the advantage of being in Ohio is not only do we have high prices, but we have pretty good yields unlike the western part of the country. So those farmers who could get their crops established and didn't have disease issues are producing an incredible soybean product this year."

And the good news for growers who have not sold off their beans yet is that the prices may continue to rise.

"Clearly we have fewer beans this year. We have a much higher price because of that which is meant to discourage the consumption and export of beans. But we are not seeing demand slow down," said Roberts. "That indicates that prices still do have room to move upwards. At the rate we are consuming and exporting soybeans, we will run out of soybeans long before next year's harvest. All of this, of course, is what is creating the confusion and uncertainty with the markets."

On the flipside, the issue with corn production is much less exciting.

The weather conditions that devastated the soybean crop out West did little to impact the corn crop. And although Ohio corn growers may also see projected record yields of 145 bushels per acre, consistent national production and average prices are generating a balanced market.

"It looks like we will consume about as much corn as we produced," said Roberts. "Corn prices have not moved significantly over the past three or four months." Corn prices are sitting at \$2.40 a bushel. Market year average price is projected between \$1.90 and \$2.30 per bushel compared to \$2.32 for last year's crop.

Roberts said a few bright spots, however, exist with U.S. corn production.

"So far corn exports have been solid. And the other big news is that ethanol demand continues to accelerate," he said. "This year about 900 million bushels of corn or roughly 8 percent of the harvest will go into ethanol, and analysts think that projection is short by a few million bushels."

Ethanol demand may push corn average prices up by another 10 cents or 15 cents, said Roberts. And the question remains how the market will react as ethanol demand increases in the future.

"In two years, we may be looking at 1.2 billion bushels going into ethanol; in another four years, 1.5 billion to 2 billion bushels of corn," said Roberts. Such continued profitability for corn, even at \$2.30 a bushel, is what continues to steer growers towards corn and away from soybeans.

"There's less global competition in corn, especially with South America continually expanding soybean production. Looking at the current projections, Brazil will produce 15 percent more soybeans this year than last year," said Roberts. "Maybe with the exception of China, no one has really expanded into corn production like that. For many American farmers, selling 200 bushels of corn at \$2.20 a bushel sounds more attractive than selling 80 bushels of soybeans at \$5 a bushel. That's where we are seeing U.S. crop production going."

Business Incubator To Boost Southern Ohio's Economy

PIKETON, Ohio — Well over 100 business and academic professionals, residents, county leaders and commissioners and committee and organization members throughout southern Ohio gathered at Ohio State University's South Centers at Piketon on Oct. 31 to witness the groundbreaking of the Endeavor Center Business Incubator and Training Facility.

The 27,000 square foot building, scheduled to be up and running in 18 months, is designed to increase jobs and enhance the economic development of the region through assistance, education and training of entrepreneurs, small business owners, existing job employees and young people fresh out of school. The site will be made available to new and expanding businesses within Ross, Pike, Jackson, Scioto and adjacent counties.

When completed, the facility will offer 26 spaces differing in size and use for entrepreneurs. The training wing of the new

building will also provide housing for Ohio State's Learning Center South, which currently provides programs for the community in a small computer lab and auditorium. The new and expanded learning center facility will include two classrooms, a computer laboratory and conference areas to accommodate meetings for various sized training classes.

The Endeavor Center construction project is being funded by grants from the U. S.

Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, the Ohio Governor's Office of Appalachia and U. S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

Local matching funds for the grants are being provided by Ohio State University Extension, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Southern Ohio Diversification Initiative and Scioto County's Office of Economic Development.