

They said it

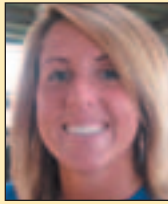
What was your favorite part of Breakfast on the Farm, and what did you learn?



"I learned that cows eat hay and grass and corn. I liked petting the baby calves."
Marissa Hufnagel,
Lansing

"The best part is seeing all the cows. It's amazing what's involved in a dairy operation."

Pam Brownlee,
East Lansing



"It's fun seeing all the cows and stuff. I learned about how they milk the cows."

Emma Schaefer,
DeWitt



humorous, at least to veteran farmers.

"One lady saw the large, covered mounds of hay and corn silage that are used for feeding and asked if that's where we kept the manure," Patti recalls with a wry laugh. An explanation quickly resolved the waste question.

It also underscores the main objective of Breakfast on the Farm.

"Having people actually on the farm, seeing how it works and talking with the owners is a great educational opportunity," Cullens says. "It's a wonderful way for the ag community to provide accurate information on its industry."

Recipe for success

"We took some ideas that I'd seen done on a Wisconsin farm, and committee members each brought additional thoughts on what would work here. Volunteers played a huge part as the plan developed. There were probably 150 people who worked over a two-day period setting things up at the farm prior to the breakfast, and then helping during the day and later taking everything down," Cullens says.

Promotion was another key to the success of the first-time event. A Web site and blog attracted guests from outside the immediate area, while members of Clinton County's Farm Bureau Promotion and Marketing Committee and others worked to get the word out locally.

"We tried to get the message out in as many ways as possible," says Cullens, noting word of mouth as being a vital communication tool.

Plans are already being made for the Second Annual Breakfast on the Farm, probably in mid-June. Dairy will be the focus again next year.

"Dairy is an important part of agriculture in Clinton County, so that seems like a natural fit for us here, but we certainly could concentrate on other aspects of farming as well," Cullens says.

For information, e-mail cullensf@msu.edu or visit www.breakfastonthefarm.com.

Dedyne writes from St. Johns.

Animal welfare bills in the works

By JENNIFER VINCENT

CONCERNED that decisions about animal care and welfare might be dictated by emotionally driven ballot initiatives, a consortium of farm groups are backing state legislation to adopt industry standards and guidelines as the law for animal agriculture.

The tie-barred bills, HB 5127 and HB 5128, sponsored by Reps. Mike Simpson, D-Jackson, and Jeff Mayes, D-Bay City, would require independent farm audits and compliance by 2020. The bills also create a 10-member council to review and possibly update animal care standards at least every five years.

The bills propose to start with, but are not limited to, existing scientific standards nationally accepted by food companies and retailers (see story below).

The council could review standards not already addressed in the act and recommend additional species-by-species standards to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and the Commission of Agriculture, which would have the sole authority to regulate.

The council would include the MDA director, two veterinarians, two farmers, a Michigan State University animal welfare researcher, a Michigan Humane Society member, a food processor, a grocer and a restaurant official.

The cost of the audits and any potential changes in management or facilities for compliance would be at the cost of the producer.

Proactive move

"It does come with a cost, but we need a system that uses science to put Michigan on the cutting edge of animal care — a system that evolves as the science changes," explains Sam Hines, executive vice president of the Michigan Pork Producers, which is supporting

Standards for animal welfare

ANIMAL care standards that would be adopted by the Michigan Department of Agriculture if the legislation passes include:

- Pork Quality Assurance Plus (National Pork Board, 2007)
- National Dairy Farm Program: Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (National Milk Producers Federation, 2008)
- Animal Husbandry Guidelines for United States Egg-Laying Flocks (United Egg Producers, 2008)
- National Chicken Council Animal Welfare Guidelines (National Chicken Council, 2005)
- Animal Care Best Management Practices for the Care of Turkeys (National Turkey Federation, 2004)
- Beef Quality Assurance Program (American Veal Association, 2001)

Key Points

- Bills would create a council to review and update standards.
- All farms would be subject to a third-party audit.
- Farm groups don't want the Humane Society to push a ballot initiative.

the legislation.

Jim Byrum, chairman of the Michigan Commission of Agriculture, agrees. "We need to take a proactive approach with animal care standards. If we allow special-interest groups to push this through as a ballot initiative, it is cut in stone, and you can't make any changes as science and technologies change," he says.

Byrum warns that other states, like California, Arizona and Florida, have passed ballot initiatives on animal care drafted by anti-animal agriculture groups that have, in some cases, made it cost-prohibitive for production to continue — forcing producers to move to other states or countries.

The Humane Society of the United States, which was behind the California initiative, strongly opposes the Michigan legislation, saying in a press release, "Rather than allowing the foxes to guard the henhouse, we urge the Legislature to reject this attempted power grab and encourage open dialogue on the issue of farm animal welfare in Michigan."

HSUS is threatening a 2010 ballot initiative to give farm animals in confined spaces more room. The group says current industry standards, including chicken cages and sow gestation and veal crates, are not adequate.

Hines says, "It's sometimes difficult for people who are not familiar with agriculture today to understand why certain practices are in place.

"The systems we have evolved after a great deal of time, observations and science, allowing for individualized care of sows. And beyond gestation stalls, controlled-environment systems allow for cooling in warm months, warming in cool months and even specialized diets. It's done for the benefit of animals themselves," he adds.

The legislation does not distinguish between size of operation, and local governments would be preempted from setting their own rules.

Hines says not letting local units of government regulate beyond the state level prevents a "hodgepodge system," which would be difficult for producers to comply with. "Some farms are spread out over multiple townships, counties and even states," he says. "This [legislation] allows for science to prevail and creates a uniform set of rules."

The legislation, which has identical bills in the Senate sponsored by Sens. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, and Gerald VanWoerkom, R-Norton Shores, is currently being debated in the House Committee on Agriculture.

News Briefs

Rowntree assistant professor of animal science at MAES

The Michigan Agriculture Experiment Station welcomed Jason Rowntree as assistant professor of animal science. His research focuses on using forage-based systems for sustainable beef production. He also studies how selenium deficiency affects a weaned calf's ability to cope with bovine respiratory disease. Before coming to MSU, Rowntree was an assistant professor of animal science at Louisiana State University since 2004. He also served as the LSU AgCenter beef Extension coordinator and chairman of the Louisiana Beef Advisory Council. Rowntree received his doctoral degree in animal nutrition from MSU in 2003, his master's degree in animal nutrition from Mississippi State University in 1998 and his bachelor's degree in animal science from Texas A&M University in 1994.

Pfizer Animal Genetics fills 2 key positions in Kalamazoo

Pfizer Animal Genetics in Kalamazoo has made two additions with the hiring of Sue DeNise and Kent Andersen. According to Pfizer, they will help build its staff of genomics experts to advance DNA-marker technology and its application. DeNise will be director of U.S. lab operations and product development. Andersen joins the team as associate director of technical services for North America. He will be responsible for the ongoing education of key industry opinion leaders and producers on the application of current and future genetic marker technology, and for the support of North American sales and marketing teams.

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Contact us:

Editor: Jennifer Vincent
jvincent@farmprogress.com
710 W. Park St., St. Johns, MI 48879
Phone and fax: 989-224-1235

Contributing Editors:

Dan Crummett, John Otte, Len Richardson, Arlan Suderman, Rod Swoboda and Lon Tonneson

Executive Editor:

Frank Holdmeyer

Corporate Editorial Director:

Willie Vogt, 651-454-6994, wvogt@farmprogress.com

Sales:

Tom Shearing Phone: 585-476-2426

Subscription Questions:

800-441-1410

For additional sales and company information, see last page of marketplace section.

POSTMASTER:

Please send address corrections to Michigan Farmer, 255 38th Ave., Suite P, St. Charles, IL 60174-5410.