

## 2012 “Today’s Agriculture” Exhibit - Visitor Feedback Summary

### Overview:

On Thursday, January 12 and Friday, January 13, Animal Agriculture Alliance staff spoke with visitors to the 2012 Pennsylvania Farm Show before and after they walked through the “Today’s Agriculture” exhibit hosted by the PennAg Industries Association. Alliance staff recorded 32 video interviews with individuals and groups to get their feedback about the exhibit and spoke with more than 100 other visitors representing a cross-sampling of those attending the show (i.e. gender, varying ages, ethnicities). Alliance staff also spent time inside the exhibit to listen to the conversations taking place between visitors and the volunteers staffing the different sections of the barn.

Overall, the response to the exhibit was overwhelmingly positive. It was most popular with families with small children, as they were attracted to the animal exhibits. The most common initial response by visitors upon walking up to the entrance of the barn was “what’s that smell?” followed by “those piglets are so adorable.” The pig exhibit was by far the most frequently cited favorite component by children and adults.

Some groups quickly walked through the barn, while others spent considerable time speaking with the volunteers. However, more adult visitors cited the veal exhibit as being the most eye-opening, as many thought dairy calf housing was actually used for veal production. Other adults were interested in the mechanics of modern farming and were impressed by the automatic watering system used in the poultry facilities and the automatic egg collection process.

Alliance staff overheard fairly frequent questions to the volunteers at the pork and egg sections about the space allocated to the sows and hens. Some visitors appeared concerned, but listened as the volunteers explained the reason for the scientifically-based housing choice. The Alliance didn’t witness any vegan/animal rights activists attempting to disrupt the exhibit. In filming its visitor interviews, the Alliance only experienced two negative reactions to the exhibit. One person identified herself as a vegetarian. The second said he was against “corporate” farming that was “controlled by the stock market”.



Alliance staff also interviewed numerous volunteers in each of the exhibit sections. Volunteers indicated that they had received mostly positive feedback from visitors, and that most of the questions were relatively simple (i.e. “how old is that cow? how much does that pig weigh?”) rather than issues-based.

In conducting the post-interviews, Alliance staff asked attendees a variety of general questions. The goal was not to lead the interviewee but provide the opportunity to share genuine feedback.

### **Questions included:**

- How do you define agriculture?
- Do you have a farm background?  
( \*Question used to determine if visitor had previous agriculture knowledge.)
- What is your idea of an American farmer today?
- How do you think animals are treated on farms?
- What did you enjoy most about the “Today’s Agriculture” exhibit?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Was it what you expected?
- Did it reflect any of the stereotypes about agriculture that you might have heard before?
- Do you believe this is representative of modern agriculture today?
- How effective do you think this exhibit was in helping you understand modern agriculture?

Answers varied widely between visitors, but several key themes emerged. First, farmers are seen as hard workers, and that was recognized as a virtue by the public. Second, people understood that farming looked different than it did in past generations.

### **Direct quotes from video interviews:**



*“I think a lot of America, especially today’s youth, grows up without thinking about where their food comes from. An exhibit like this is really useful to get the ball rolling.”*

*“Having it in this exhibit area rather than the show animals keeps the focus on the exhibit.”*

*“It’s nice to see that there is plenty of room for the calves to move around. They look comfortable. If you drink milk, you can’t really say you don’t like veal because it goes hand in hand.”*

*“[My favorite part was] the baby pigs and the baby cows. How they looked and how cute and adorable they were.”*

*“I didn’t know that chickens were considered agriculture... I knew that animals were part of agriculture, but I thought agriculture was mostly [crop] farming, not animals.”*

*“It was cool to see the whole farm together.”*

*“I like the animals. We met a nice young man who was telling us about his travels around the country with the Pork Producers. “*

*“Farming has changed, the technology involved has come a long way. It’s not your father’s farm!”*

*“Farmers work hard for what they do and we shouldn’t take advantage of that.”*

*“The controversy about veal being produced – this exhibit opens people’s eyes about how they are really raised.”*

*“This is the latest and most modern of what agriculture is doing. Agriculture is changing with the times.”*

*“Really great setup shows how animals are raised.”*

*“The weight of the cow was surprising; a lot of people were guessing and were way off.”*

*“[I thought that] the least amount of land and living space that the animals need to be productive [was the most surprising].”*

*“I was very surprised how items used on the farm are recycled.”*

*“I think it’s a great display, I really do.”*

*“A farmer deserves all the praise in the world for what he does. It is hard work and most of the time they don’t get the credit they deserve.”*

*“I know for a fact that it [farming] is a lot of work.”*

*“I really enjoyed seeing the piglets and sows. I found some things out about hens – like they lay one egg a day, which I didn’t know before.”*

*“It was really interesting to see the cow grooming brush.”*

*“I was interested in the display with the dairy farmer that used clay for the bedding – was it the same principle as kitty litter?”*

*“I think how they [the volunteers] act is nicer [than I expected a farmer to act], like how they treat their animals.”*

*“Very clean. Friendly people working. Interesting to see how chicken system worked.”*

*“It was a lot better than what I expected [farming to look like]. I have watched a lot of documentaries on raising chickens – Food, Inc – and this was a lot more humane. I liked what I saw.”*

*“I wouldn’t mind having [an exhibit like] that for my business.”*



## **Conclusion:**

The “Today’s Agriculture” generated a large amount of visitor traffic through the exhibit that did not have an agricultural background. Families with young children were the most likely to spend a substantial amount of time watching the animals and interacting with the volunteers. Some groups walked quickly through the barn and did not pay much attention to it. Others returned to it multiple times to speak with the volunteers. Most attendees who were interviewed indicated that they thought that the exhibit was an accurate reflection of modern agriculture and that they supported the work of American farmers.