

Ag and Feed Alliance Stresses Continuity, Change

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New York Correspondent

ALBANY, N.Y. — The Northeast Ag and Feed Alliance held its ninth annual meeting Feb. 4-5, drawing nearly 200 people to Albany to hear experts discuss issues core to the trade industry organization's mission and members.

Future Farmers of America provided an opening ceremony, followed by welcomes from outgoing board President Art Whitman and Executive Director Rick Zimmerman.

Referring to the Ram Trucks Super Bowl ad, "So God Made a Farmer," and another commercial for Lincoln cars, Zimmerman

said they reflected continuity, and change, two elements important to the alliance.

"It's always a challenge to remain relevant," he said. "Value is in the eye of the beholder, driven by when we were born."

This necessitates that the organization acknowledge and serve the changing needs of its members, across generations and technology divides, amidst a changing industry, he said.

"The alliance made an effort to build relationships throughout the Northeast, meeting with land grant colleges and universities, legislators and secretaries, commissioners and directors of agriculture in the Northeast," said Louise Calderwood, director of government relations for the alliance.

Such relationships led to the agriculture depart-

ment in New Hampshire reaching out to the alliance as key legislation is considered, he said.

Mary Keough Ledman, founder of Keough Ledman Associates, a dairy economic consulting firm, and publisher of the Daily Dairy Report, gave a detailed analysis of dairy prices over the last few years, and made some predictions.

"Dairy farmers around the world are having their profitability pinched," Ledman said, describing 2012, which had a strong start but experienced a serious price dip with the drought.

She said recovery or expansion is not expected until at least the second half of 2013, or even 2014, depending on weather and markets. "Favorable grain harvests will help milk prices," she said.

After a thorough overview of world and national markets, broken down by regions in the United States, and lead players around the



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Jeff Simmons, president of Elanco, discusses food production and food security at the Northeast Ag and Feed Alliance annual meeting in Albany, N.Y.

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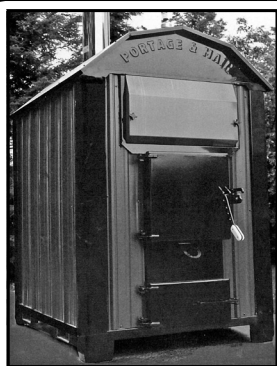
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world, Ledman took questions from the audience. The first regarded the decline in fluid consumption and general shift in milk utilization to nonfluid products. What advice did she have for the dairy industry in the Northeast?

The question opened up a frank assessment of the dairy industry and the problem of fluid milk pricing. The current system, Ledman said, is based on outdated problems.

"We didn't have transportation or refrigeration then as we do now, and here we are 70 years later, using a system designed for the policy challenges of 1937," she said. "People come to me and say, 'I have a new product.' We discuss the different

classes of milk prices and how they are regulated versus other dairy ingredients. Often they decide they can use whole milk powder or non-fat dried milk in the formulation because dry ingredient prices are less complicated and dry products can be stored. That new product might taste a whole lot better with fresh fluid milk."

Changing the way milk is priced will be key to the industry, Ledman said.

During a break, Whitman spoke about his experience with the alliance, and with its predecessor, the Northeast Grain and Feed Council.

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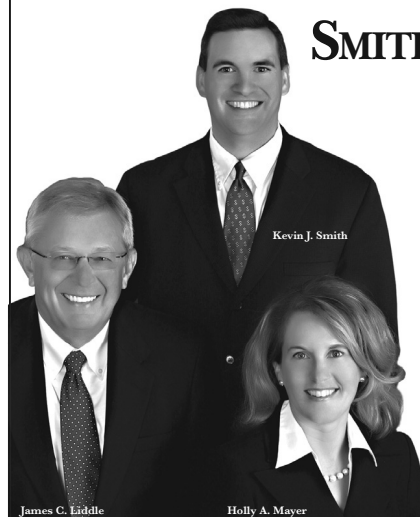
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