



## A Circus at MSU?

**D**ateline January 2009: Michigan State University denies a request by the Caravan Youth Center to host the Royal Hanneford Circus in the University's Breslin Center as a fundraiser for local charities.

Why did this 23-year tradition end? Because a small group of protesters don't think animals should be used for human entertainment, and the University acquiesced to their demands.

Sounds farfetched doesn't it? One of the leading agricultural schools in the world saying no to animal acts. Right or wrong, MSU has received a great deal of criticism over this decision. So far reaching was the criticism that it might be overshadowing the many positive acts MSU undertakes to the benefit of agriculture and mankind.

Ironically, about 10 days before the circus news hit the airways, I was involved in a meeting of the Stakeholders Advisory Council for the MSU Department of Animal Science. The meeting is a semi-annual event designed to update the stakeholders of current issues in the department, past performance, and future needs the department should be addressing to best bring about animal agriculture's success tomorrow. The stakeholders, made up of representatives of all of Michigan's production animal agriculture, have the responsibility to provide feedback assessing MSU's performance and guiding it on addressing industry needs. I left the meeting that day feeling pretty good about the progress being made to accom-

plish that goal. We looked at the key role MSU plays in the 4-H program, and we heard presentations by current and past 4-H members. All expressed gratitude for the role the Department of Animal Science had played in their lives. Positive influences they had experienced through 4-H had led them to enroll at MSU in various curriculums available through the Department of Animal Science. These have led some to careers in agriculture, while others are still studying with the ultimate goal of obtaining careers in agriculture.

Not all the 4-H members with whom MSU comes in contact through various summer programs for youth will have careers in agriculture. Despite that fact, MSU will have played an important role in helping all the students prepare for adulthood, as well as educating them about agriculture, because many 4-H members are not born and raised on farms. Increasing the knowledge level about our industry with consumers of all ages eases their concerns about how their food is grown. The anti-animal and other radical activists have made it a point to begin advocating their agenda to children at an early age. We need to be there too.

Another area where MSU is responsive to our industry is in the training of professionals who work with animals. MSU heard our concerns regarding the critical need for food-animal veterinarians and responded by instituting the Production Medicine Scholars Program. This program was jointly developed by the Department of Animal Science and the College of Veterinary

Medicine to encourage interested students to pursue food-animal medicine careers. The program has not been in existence long enough to give it a fair evaluation, but it does show great promise that it will lead to more graduates entering these types of practices.

This critical area of educating professionals encompasses a broader spectrum than one might first imagine. It includes not just the veterinarians we need on the farm but also veterinarians to fill the many regulatory positions at both the state and federal levels. The dairy industry is far better served if the people in regulatory positions have practical experience with food animals to complement their education and professional training. The educational component of veterinary science is more complete if it includes some interaction with people who have practical food animal experience.

MSU is involved in another important area: environmental science, including water and air quality issues. Dairy producers—and all farmers, for that matter—need practical, cost effective methods to protect the environment while they produce food and fiber for U.S. consumers and the growing export market. MSU has done a very good job of staffing positions with dedicated people who have excellent credentials to tackle the critical environmental issues facing us today and tomorrow.

Recognizing the growing need to better understand issues of animal well-being, MSU has recruited

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