Oink Outings Open the Doors — Connecting City to Farm

It sounds like a fantastic Groupon offering. First, a private food demonstration with an award-winning executive chef using the freshest ingredients in new and exciting styles. Then, an on-site tour with the dedicated farmer who makes possible delicacies like pork Diablo bites, blue cheese and prosciutto wrapped peaches, tequila glazed pork tenderloin skewers and sweet soy pork tian.

No, it's not Agritourismo in Tuscany, but “Oink Outings” in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Pork Board is in the second year of its successful Oink Outings program, which brings city folks and pig farmers together with a mission to demonstrate how farmers care for and raise pigs. Oink Outings came about after surveys showed consumers trusted farmers, but didn’t really know what they did.

There are two parts to the Oink Outings campaign. First, is a farm-to-fork tour with chefs, moms, and farmers and second is a booth staffed by pork farmers that travels around the metro area (see the article on page 3).

"The Oink Outings are one tactic to open the doors and provide more transparency into what we do every day on the farm," says Dave Preisler, Executive Director Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA). "As folks become more disconnected from the farm, it’s a challenge for them to understand how their food is produced and connect with the people who produce it."

The farm-to-fork tours target moms, the primary food decision makers for a family. For each tour, five to six Twin Cities moms who are community leaders or social media bloggers (and thus can amplify the message) are invited to a daylong experience that begins with a food demonstration and a pork themed meal by a metro area chef at a restaurant and ends with a tour of a working pig farm. The moms, farmers, and chef spend the entire day together, building relationships and learning from each other. Five mom tours were conducted in 2011 with five scheduled for 2012.

Participating chefs have included: Paul Lynch of Firelake Grill, Ben McCallum of Three Sons Signature Cuisine, Peter Christenson of Woolley’s Steakhouse and American Eatery, Jack Riebel of the Butcher and the Boar, Bryan Schouten of Bracketts Crossing Country Club, and Julian Grainger of The Hilton.

Participating pork farms have included: Schaefer Farms, Goodhue; Rebco Pork, Courtland; and Peter Marcus Farm, part of Wakefield Pork in Lafeyette.

BUILDING TRUST

"The important thing is farmers are making a connection," says Preisler. "It comes down to trust. Do consumers trust the folks who are raising their food? Once they get to know the farmer that trust level really grows. It’s not about the size of the farm. It’s about whether they care about what they are doing and do they care about the animals."

"Every agricultural group should take the time to do what the pork industry is doing and show people what is behind their doors because that is the only way they can counter the perceptions portrayed by the media."

- Amy Charest, Eden Prairie, Minnesota mom

The Minnesota Pork Board worked with the public relations firm Weber Shandwick to develop the program. "We survey the moms before and after the tour to gauge how their perceptions about pork and pork production have changed," explains Emily Negrin, account supervisor. "We saw the moms’ trust levels increase significantly after the tours in 2011. Before the tours, 17 percent of participants strongly agreed with the statement: ‘I trust Minnesota pig farmers to provide the highest level of care for their animals.’ After the tour 80 percent strongly agreed with that statement."

Rebco Pork owner Judy Bode has farmed for 42 years and has hosted two mom tours. "Most people have no idea how pork is raised and we think it’s important that they understand the work we put into it and how we and our employees take such good care of the animals," says Bode. "When we drive back to the Cities after the tour, the moms have so many questions. It’s amazing to me how really interested they are in what we are doing. It’s neat for me to hear how pleased they are with the cleanliness and comfort of our pigs."

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Minnesota Agri-Growth Council Newsletter

Member In Focus

Company: Hydro Engineering  
Website: www.hydro-eng.com  
Location: Main office is located in Norwood Young America, MN, with an irrigation office located in Rockville MN.

Hydro Engineering started in 1971 as an agriculture turnkey irrigation company that drilled water wells and installed center pivots and pipelines. That same year Hydro Engineering developed the *Hydro Soft Hose Traveling Gun* that became popular for irrigation and liquid manure applications throughout the United States. In 1978 Hydro Engineering developed a complete draghose manure injection and pumping line of equipment based off the experience the company had from using and developing the soft hose traveling gun. In the 1980’s Hydro Engineering became a general contractor for municipal wastewater treatment systems. From the many years of developing the draghose injection system, Hydro Engineering now has become a premier company for irrigation and manure applications, manufacturing equipment such as hose couplers, pumping units, hose reels and injection toolbars and more. All of which was undertaken with the end user in mind, working to help make their manure or sludge application more efficient.

Hydro Engineering’s business scope is becoming more important due to the rapidly changing business cultures, such as custom applicators and the growing size of animal units per farm site. The agriculture environment is also greatly influenced by the price of crops, fertilizer, fuel and weather patterns throughout the world.

Q & A with the Hydro Engineering Sales Department:

**What is new with Hydro Engineering?**
After 40 years, Hydro Engineering has changed ownership. This was done in order to advance the company’s *Zimmatic Irrigation* and *Hydro Drag Hose Injection* equipment lines. Hydro Engineering is constantly upgrading & developing new equipment product lines to address any new challenges in the drag hose injection and irrigation market place.

**What are the key issues or trends affecting your industry?**
One of the key trends that has been around for a significant amount of time is to apply all liquid manure into the soil at correct agronomic rates for what that crop will uptake for that season. The application equipment needs to apply the manure onto the soil in the least amount of time possible, while keeping safety in mind for employees. We also keep fuel efficiency and safety a top priority in all of our applications and equipment development.

**What are your legislative priorities?**
The draghose injection and pumping equipment that we manufacture meets the government legislation requirements for applying the liquid manure at correct agronomical rates. Before that, most manure was wasted because of over-applying on the fields closest to the barn. Now it is applied as a high-valued fertilizer on fields one, two or three miles away from the barn. Benefits include increased crop production while being more environmentally safe.
Oink Outings Booth Locations Increased

The Oink Outings Booth brings farmers to the metro area to connect with consumers who have little to no connection to a farm or how their food is produced. Pork producers staff the booth at urban and suburban community events, festivals, and farmers’ markets. For every question a consumer asks, one pound of ground pork is donated to Second Harvest Heartland. “The ‘Ask a Farmer, Feed a Family’ approach has really helped bring people into our booth,” says Pam Voelkel, director of events, Minnesota Pork Board. “These events have been a great place to engage in conversations. They are very interested in talking with the farmers.” The Pork Board was so pleased with the results from seven Oink Outing events in 2011, that it has planned 25 booth events for 2012. “The farmers markets are a great venue because people’s minds are already on food,” says Voelkel.

New for 2012, is a partnership with the Minnesota Zoo where the Oink Outings booth is part of the zoo’s spring Farm Babies exhibit and Fall Harvest Festival as well as at the zoo’s monthly farmers market. Next year, the Pork Board is planning to develop new signage, an interactive display and a video for the zoo’s farmyard exhibit. “The zoo’s exhibit represents a 1970’s style of farm. We want to bridge the gap between then and now,” says Dave Preisler, MPPA executive director, noting that more than 1.3 million people visit the zoo each year.

Amy Christie is a Twin Cities mom and blogger (thisheartofmineblog.com) who attended an Oink Outing tour in June, where they toured the Peter Marcus Farm and were treated to a meal by Chef Julian Grainger of The Hilton. It included watermelon salad with feta and prosciutto, Banh Mi Pork Tian, a plate of sweet soy pork, sweet carrot rice, and Napa slaw with a chili lime vinaigrette. Dessert was vanilla ice cream with candied pecans, candied bacon and a bacon lollipop. “Getting the opportunity to ask questions and watch a professional chef make food was so cool,” she says.

Her impression of the farm? “The documentation done on each animal is impressive. Even though it was a large operation, I felt the animals got individual care. I could see employees’ passion for making sure each animal got what it needed,” says Charest. “It was very clear from the farm visit that medicine is used judiciously and that they were concerned about the animals’ welfare. Yes, the animals are being raised for food, but they are well cared for.”

Brandon Shafer of Schafer Farms has hosted two Mom tours on his family’s farm in Goodhue. He says, “If we don’t actively engage in educating the consumer, they will seek information from someone else. We run the risk of them learning from someone who doesn’t understand the real story or has little desire to carry an accurate message forward.”

During the tours, the moms said, “I didn’t realize this…. And I didn’t realize that…” Their curiosity and all of the “I didn’t realize statements” reinforced to Schafer how important it is to reach out to consumers. “I think the investment of a day or two in preparation and execution of a tour or outreach to a consuming public is absolutely critical,” he says.

Executive Chef Bryan Schouten visited Rebco Pork. “The farm was a family run business and it was very well managed. They were proud of what they do and that is important to me. That pride comes through in the quality of the end product just as it does in the culinary world,” he says.

Amy Charest, another mom and local blogger (amyontheprairie.com) attended a tour of Wakefield Pork last year and learned how to cook tamale pie.

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Linda Tank, CHS, Inc.

www.agrigrowth.org
Event Calendar: 2012

OCTOBER
5: Agri-Growth Board Meeting

NOVEMBER
6: General Election
13: Annual Meeting & Speakers Conference

Beat the rush and reserve your seat at the 2012 Agri-Growth Annual Meeting and Speakers Conference! This year’s conference will be held on Tuesday, November 13th at the Minneapolis Convention Center. More than 400 industry leaders, news media, government relations professionals, commodity groups, farmer leaders and public officials gather to review industry trends and topics. The event is a comprehensive one-day program, which includes a membership meeting, speakers conference, exhibitors, and luncheon program featuring high level keynote speakers and the presentation of the Distinguished Service Award.

The program will feature an impressive line-up of presenters and panelists will address the current issues facing the food and agriculture industry. Attendees will hear from Governor Mark Dayton (tentative), Dr. Michael Swanson the Agriculture Economist at Wells Fargo, and Mr. Richard Berman of the Center for Consumer Freedom. The afternoon program will also include a mixed State and National panel reviewing the 2012 Election. After 45 years of successful and meaningful programs, the Agri-Growth Council Annual Meeting & Speakers Conference is one you won’t want to miss!

Learn more about the program and register to attend at www.agrigrowth.org/AM.