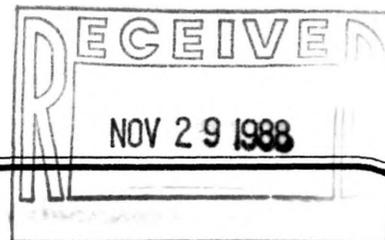




NEWS

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PLANE SAYS PROPER MANAGEMENT OF FOOD-PROCESSING WASTES CAN AID, NOT AGGRAVATE, TODAY'S ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Geneva, N.Y.-- In remarks prepared for delivery to Gov. Mario Cuomo's "Agriculture and the Environment" meetings in Albany this week, Dr. Robert A. Plane, director of Cornell University's NYS Agricultural Experiment Station, said that waste materials from processing the state's fruits and vegetables might well be beneficial, not damaging, to the environment.

Plane said that processing waste, rather than being harmful, can represent a usable and valuable "raw product."

"Processing wastes (unlike most other industrial wastes) are similar to food-grade agricultural products... pure, wholesome and safe," Plane said. "Clearly, the way food processing wastes are handled presents a challenge that will not be met by treating them the same as wastes from other industries." He noted that a DEC conditional exemption for vegetative products supports the contention that processing wastes can be utilized and "recycled" for such uses as animal feed and plant fertilizer.

"It is perhaps unfortunate that only a minority of industries have seized upon this opportunity. Some research may be needed, but in partnership with the farm community and with the development of some innovative technology, opportunities exist for all concerned."

Plane pointed to what some processors term "over-regulation" as one reason for a decline in the food-processing industry in New York. He said that the loss of food-processing jobs since the '60s has been dramatic. In 1963, an estimated 128,800 people were at work processing and packaging food in New York. In 1985, the figure had dwindled to 63,900. He said that 3.8 jobs are dependent on every one job in the food industry. Applied to the decline since 1963, that represents a loss of more than 180,000 workers in just over 20 years.

"The regulatory climate, which has been cited as restrictive (by processors) in the past, and which has discouraged capital expansion, is undergoing changes for the better," Plane said. "Now is the time for the food industry to adopt a widespread program of beneficial re-use of its wastes through the production of marketable products such as animal feed and compost." He said that the state currently has a "golden opportunity" to encourage the return and expansion of the food processing industry.

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"Research on the unique and positive aspects of food wastes could lead to new processes and new regulations that will give New York State an edge in agriculture-related industrial expansion, thus more jobs; in marketing aid to farmers; in maintaining soil fertility, and in ensuring a safe and healthy environment," Plane said.

"In all of this," he concluded, "the farmer is the central figure. No one has a larger stake in conserving the environment. History has shown agriculture to be a better husband to our land than any other segment of society."

Plane, an ex-Provost at Cornell and former president of Clarkson University, heads the 360-person faculty and staff of the Geneva Experiment Station which is dedicated to the protection, preservation and processing of foods. The two-day Albany sessions also featured talks by Ag & Markets Comm. Donald G. Butcher, DEC Comm. Thomas C. Jorling, Gov. Cuomo, and representatives from California, Wisconsin, Washington and Indiana as well as New York.

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Ed. Note: The entire text of Dr. Plane's remarks is available on request.