

A View From The Governor's Office

By Gov. Raymond P. Shafer

A plan to preserve Pennsylvania's prime farmland by establishing agricultural use areas with a minimum of 4,000 contiguous acres each is now under consideration by this Administration.

The recommendation was contained in a final report of the Governor's Committee for the Preservation of Agricultural Land headed by Curtis B. Wachsmuth, of Mechanicsburg and would provide financial incentives for farmers whose land is included in such agricultural use areas.

Assessments would be based on agricultural values only; owners would be compensated for allowing hunting and fishing on their properties and for maintaining watershed protection; and heirs of landowners who continue to participate in the plan would be eligible for State inheritance tax exemption on the land.

The Agricultural Land Conservation Plan also would restrict public improvements in an agricultural use area when low cost is a motivating factor in site selection and curb acquisition of agricultural use land through eminent domain.

The report also recommends developing a comprehensive State land use plan as rapidly as possible to include agricultural interests, and an immediate interim plan based on existing county and township plans. It also recommends establishment of a commission to review proposed conversion of agricultural land to other purposes.

Other recommendations include:

Encourage individuals to voluntarily use their land resources wisely; strengthen Pennsylvania's agricultural economy, and develop a strong program for informing the public of the contin-

uing necessity of planning all land use.

"We believe," Wachsmuth said "that these recommendations, wisely implemented, will enable Pennsylvania to retain one of its most important industries, preserve the most important features of its natural beauty, and assure its citizens of the opportunity to achieve a happy, healthy and productive life."

The 18-man committee was appointed two years ago to study the problem of agricultural land losses in Pennsylvania and recommend a corrective program "consistent with the total land requirements of the State." It functioned as an arm of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

The plan proposed by the committee would authorize county commissioners to establish agricultural use areas following public hearings held at the request of 15 or more landowners.

"The Committee is convinced," the report stated, "that the preservation of a portion of the Commonwealth's best agricultural

land is absolutely necessary and vital to the social and economic well-being of Pennsylvania."

The report pointed out that agriculture is a billion-dollar business in Pennsylvania, and that agriculture and agribusiness — industries, such as food processing, that are directly related to agriculture — provide jobs for 2.1 million Pennsylvanians who receive \$9.5 billion in wages annually.

It also pointed out that almost half of Pennsylvania's farmland has been lost to food production since the turn of the century. "This includes 420,000 acres of some of Pennsylvania's best agricultural land which has been diverted to non-agricultural uses in the past 10 years," the report said.

At the present time, the report said, "an average of 115 acres of agricultural land is being transferred to other uses each day."

The wise preservation of our agricultural land is indeed a necessity for the health and well-being of all Pennsylvanians, and I am certain this report will receive every consideration in formulating future land policies in the Commonwealth.

What's going to be under our Christmas tree is us—long-staying relatives have taken over the bedrooms.

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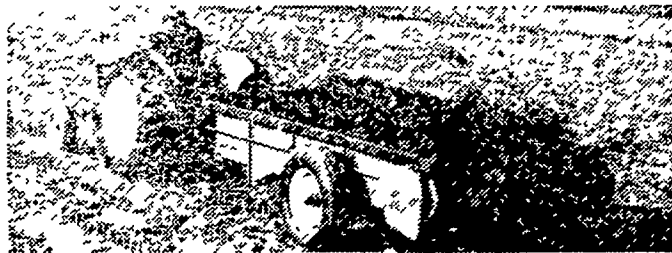
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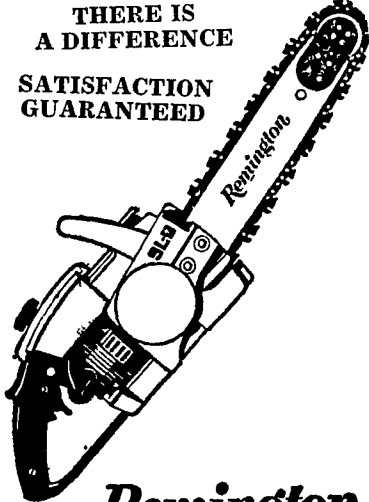
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