

Keystone Expo

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by the formation of the Keystone Exposition Center Committee, with Reber as chairman.

To find out more about the proposed Keystone Expo, Lancaster Farming talked to Dr. Reber this week together with Secretary of Agriculture James McHale in McHale's Harrisburg office.

"We have seen a tremendous amount of support - bipartisan support - for the Keystone Exposition Center," Reber said. "We have the backing of just about every farm organization in the state. There's a bill now in a Senate committee, Senate Bill 1379, which would provide \$150 million for the construction of a new facility. If that bill gets out of committee before March 1, and if it is passed by both houses of the General Assembly, it will be

pledge of whole-hearted support from Governor Milton Shapp, and signed by the Governor. He has said he would sign it. If all those things happen, we could have at least part of the Keystone Expo open for the 1976 Farm Show."

Both Reber and McHale were quick to point out that the proposed center would be used throughout the year, not just during Farm Show week. Even now, the present facility sees service all year long, with rents being collected for everything from rock concerts to mobile home shows to livestock events.

"We had 113 events last year," McHale said, "but we're losing a lot of national and international shows to other places like Louisville, Kentucky, where they've got much better facilities for handling really big events." Besides, the Farm Show Building

is very difficult to reach. And there isn't enough parking space."

A number of sites more convenient to good roads would be considered for the exposition center. One site that would not be considered is the present one. Studies have shown that renovation of the old buildings would simply not be economical. Tearing the old complex down and starting over might make sense economically, but the site would still be plagued by periodic floods and horrendous traffic problems during Farm Show-week. Living traffic nightmares include the tale of one man who last year took five hours to get from downtown Harrisburg to the Farm Show parking lot.

The Keystone Expo would have just about twice as much physical plant as the present complex. A main arena would have 15,000 seats, compared with the present 7500. A small arena would seat 3500 compared with the present 1500, and there would be 555,000 square feet of exhibition area, compared with the present 333,000. Parking would also be expanded considerably. The new facility would be equipped to handle peak loads of 200,000 people, with an average of 150,000, it would have space for 300 trucks, 500 buses and 35,000 automobiles a day.

"Let's remember, though, that we're not proposing a Farm Show Building," Reber noted. "This is an exposition center, and it is to be used for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians, not just farmers."

Reber said the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association and the state Chamber of Commerce had already expressed interest in the center. Most of the events now staged in the old facility would no doubt use a more modern one. He said the committee has even discussed the possibility of in-

cluding a center for the performing arts among the expo's facilities.

Could a Keystone Exposition Center be self-supporting? "I think of the center as a \$150 million investment," Reber said. "It could collect more rents than the state is now getting, and it could certainly generate more business and more tax revenues than the present facility. Last year in the Farm Show Building we had one horse auction where the sales topped \$4 million. The state collected six percent sales tax from that \$4 million. We could use more events like that, and I think the Keystone Expo would be a way to get them."

Increased business for nearby hotels, restaurants and service firms were other pluses, Reber and McHale felt, for a new facility.

How do you justify to the non-

farming public a \$150 million expenditure for a facility to replace a worn out Farm Show Building? Why not just forget about the Farm Show? "First of all," Reber said, "the Keystone Exposition Center would not be just for an annual Farm Show. Secondly, agriculture is important, vitally important, to the people of the Northeast."

"If a Keystone Expo can help the people of Pennsylvania and the rest of the Northeast learn more about farming, and the fact that farmers are creating renewable food and fiber resources, then I think it would more than pay for itself."

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