

Meeting Held Here To Discuss USDA "One-Stop" Centers

by Sally Bair
Lancaster County has been selected as the Pennsylvania pilot for a nationwide effort by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to locate all USDA-related agricultural service agencies for one county under a common roof. According to Benny Martin, chairman of the State Administrative Committee which will oversee the project, Lancaster county was selected because all the agencies have the largest workload in this county and because there is already a common facility, the Farm and Home Center. The purpose of co-locating agencies, according to a directive from Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, is to

provide better service to the agriculture clientele whom all the agencies serve."

There are approximately 70 designated pilot centers around the country and the plan, according to Martin, is that all agencies will eventually belong to an "agricultural service center." In some cases there will be single county units and in other cases there may be centers set up to serve multi-county areas, Martin says.

In Lancaster County participating agencies will be the Lancaster Conservation District, Farmers Home Administration, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Soil Conservation Service and Penn State Extension Service. All are presently located in the Farm and Home Center. Statewide, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation has also agreed to seek opportunities for co-locating.

Martin said these agencies will "look for opportunities for co-locating when the need arises for new headquarters." He added that no timetable has been set to accomplish the project statewide.

At a meeting held last week at Lancaster's Farm and Home Center with the state agency heads and local agency representatives, it was emphasized that the agencies' work and policies will not in any way be altered. The purpose of co-locating is simply an effort by USDA to provide the best possible service to all their clientele.

A local Center Administration Committee (CAC) has been established to work out agreements for the local center. Agencies other than USDA-related can be invited to join the local CAC where practical.

According to the proposed draft agreement, common administrative support services would be shared whenever possible. Such services could include office equipment, furniture, file rooms, storage space, etc. Other services currently being shared are meeting rooms, parking, and, of course, the building itself.

Dr. Thomas King, associate director of Extension, commented, "Lancaster has basically achieved what USDA wants—they already have the kind of 'one-stop center' advocated by Secretary Butz." He said the purpose of the local committee will be to "make things work better internally and see where it is possible to share services." He said the committee should "keep the customer in mind when deciding how to make it more economical and efficient."

The local committee hopes to submit its proposed memorandum of agreement by November 1. Any proposals must be approved by the State Committee before further action can be taken.

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