

Jane Alexander, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture . . .

# Ag's Number 2 Man is a Lady

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is involved in a lot of things besides production agriculture. The lady who's generally responsible for overseeing these operations is Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jane Alexander, a York County attorney and a former member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

Mrs. Alexander - her husband, P. Nelson, is also an attorney and her legal partner - heads up the department's seven regional offices, the Bureau of Rural Affairs, and the Bureau of Weights and Measures. She also handles relations with other states in areas which fall under the department's aegis.

Although her profession made her more familiar with courtrooms than cornfields,

Mrs. Alexander says she was no stranger to agriculture when she joined the department in 1971 as director of the Bureau of Foods and Chemistry. During a recent interview in her Harrisburg office, Mrs. Alexander told Lancaster Farming, "As a lawyer, I had represented just about every kind of group that was involved with the bureau. I worked with feed and fertilizer companies, orchards, millers, broiler growers, feed dealers. I worked with mushroom growers and the grape industry. To represent clients like that, I had to learn a lot of basic facts about the way they operate. That exposure to agriculture has been invaluable to me here at the department."

With the regional offices - she calls them mini departments of agriculture - Mrs. Alexander is responsible for seeing that all programs begun in Harrisburg are implemented throughout the state.

Each regional office has one rural and one consumer coordinator. The rural coordinators work with local governments to identify needs and problems and potential areas for improvement. "An example of that kind of work," Mrs. Alexander said, "was a pilot project we conducted this past summer in Indiana County. We worked through

the welfare department to provide seeds and young plants to welfare recipients so they could grow some of their own food. We feel the program was successful, and we plan to expand it to other counties next year."

The consumer coordinators in the regional offices work with such groups as senior citizens and high schoolers. Educational programs are designed to teach these groups basic nutrition planning and money-saving food shopping methods.

The Bureau of Rural Affairs, also in Mrs. Alexander's baliwick, is the focal point of much of the criticism leveled by farmers at their department. This is where the rural transportation and housing programs began. Mrs. Alexander defends the work of that bureau by saying, "You must remember that Pennsylvania has the largest rural population of any state in the country. And the disadvantaged - especially the aged - are a significant portion of our rural population."

"These are proud and independent people, though, and their philosophy is that they'd rather take care of themselves. Our goal is to help them do that. We're working with transportation problems in 23 counties,

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Jane Alexander, a York County attorney who is Pennsylvania's Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, discussed her role within the

department during a recent Lancaster Farming interview in her Harrisburg office.

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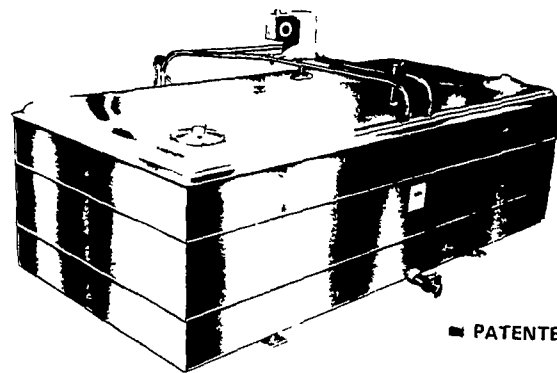
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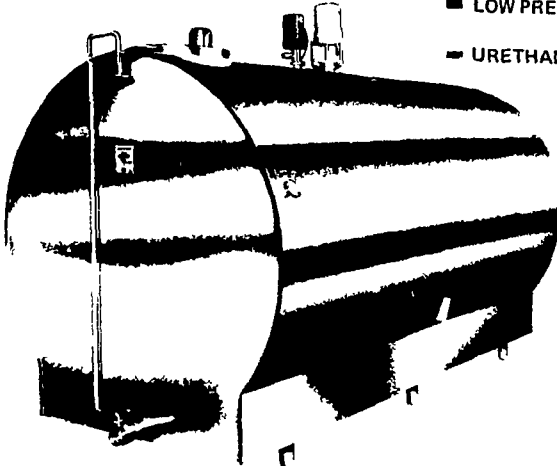
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