

On the Hill

BY REP. KENT SHELHAMER
Chairman, Agriculture Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

I consider it a privilege to have been appointed Chairman of the House of Representatives Agriculture and Dairy Industries Committee for the 1975-1976 session of the Legislature.

It has already become apparent that this Bicentennial Legislature will be one of the busiest sessions in the history of our Commonwealth, and the large volume of work and deliberation involved in the chairmanship will make it necessary for me to curtail a

lot of the informal face-to-face meetings in the field with my friends in the industry. Hence, I hope to be able to keep you informed of Legislation that affects the agriculture industry through the use of this column, and I would like to express my gratitude to the news media at the outset for their cooperation in helping to disseminate information which I feel is important to you.

Last November, I had the unforgettable experience

attending the World Food Conference in Rome, where it was revealed that millions of people are starving in all corners of the globe despite technological advances in our industry that have greatly increased production and marketing methods.

It is not that we lack the capacity or the means to satisfy the appetites of a burgeoning world population - it is a sad fact of life that more and more farmers have had to forsake their chosen profession in favor of full-time jobs in factories and industry in order to provide a livelihood for their families.

As a result, there are less farms, less farmers, and as a consequence, a lot less food for the world market. For instance, you might be surprised to learn that in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania alone, there are 30,000 fewer farms today than there were just 15 years ago!

Imagine... we have lost over two and a half million acres of precious farmland in the state since 1960; much of it, I am sure, to sprawling suburban land developments which have swallowed up countless thousands of acres to those "amber waves of grain" we hear about in the song. And many more thousands of acres were lost because of the inability of so many industrious farmers to make a decent profit from the land.

These are trying times for the farmer. He has seen his costs of operation skyrocket in the past two years, and even now he faces the prospect of another healthy increase in the price of fuel, which could impose another worrisome burden and cut

even deeper into his dwindling profit picture.

As a farmer-legislator, I am well aware of the impact the agricultural industry has on the state's economy. The industry still occupies well over a third of Pennsylvania's total acreage, and generates over a billion dollars in volume each year. A business of such magnitude deserves consideration, and in my post as Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, I intend to give it my best efforts.

At the present time, even though the legislative session is just a few weeks old, there is a veritable mountain of proposed farm legislation on my desk. As with all proposals of such volume, some of it is good, and some of it is insignificant.

In the days ahead, the Agriculture Committee will sift through these proposals and will draft legislation on those items which we consider vital to the farmer and the Commonwealth. Through this column, I intend to keep you informed on the progress of our proposed legislation.

Naturally, we on the Agriculture Committee don't have all the answers to your problems, but I can assure you that we stand ready to lend an attentive ear to all of your suggestions, and if they have merit, they will receive the sincere recommendation of the Committee.

Don't hesitate to contact my office in Harrisburg whenever you have an idea that might be beneficial to both the agricultural industry and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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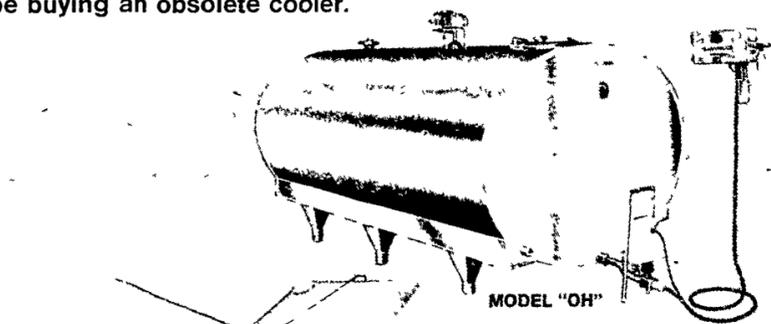
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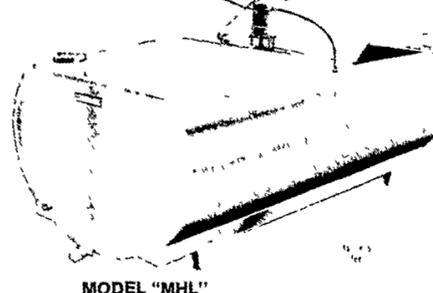
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