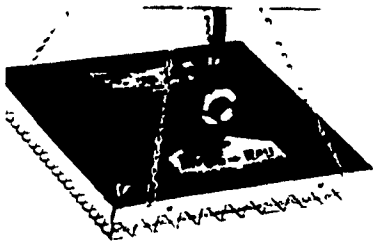




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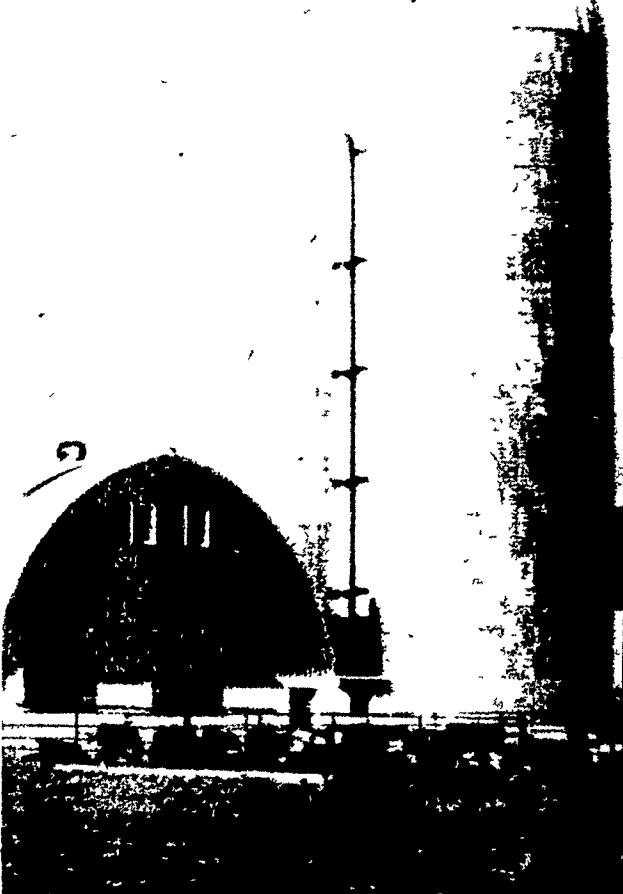
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On the Hill

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

By Rep. Kent Shelhamer,
Chairman House Agriculture Committee

Among the bills I have introduced in the present session of the Legislature, there are two that I feel are especially significant, in that they represent an effort to prevent further unnecessary depletion of our valuable farm acreage.

In recent years, housing developments have virtually surrounded most of our workable farms. This suburban growth has caused the Commonwealth to mandate sewage services to these areas, and our municipalities and townships have to lay thousands of feet of sewer and water lines to comply with the laws.

Obviously, in many cases, the lines will be placed parallel to farms near the developments. If the municipality or authority were to impose an assessment on the farm owner, he would suffer an unfair financial hardship, simply because of the large amount of front footage he owns.

My bill would exempt any farm which has been in agricultural use for three years prior to the laying of the water and sewer lines.

The bill, House Bill 217, also provides that if and when the owner or subsequent owner of the land avails himself of the services, he becomes liable in the same manner as other property owners were assessed at the time the installation was made. The proposal is now in the hands of the House Agriculture Committee, which I head, and I expect that it will be sent out to the House floor for a vote at an early date.

Another bill which I feel is

important to the agricultural industry in House Bill 219, which I introduced early in February. This bill would prohibit the taking of most agricultural lands for highway purposes or for the disposal of solid waste material, by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or any of its political subdivisions or agencies or authorities unless it is determined that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of such land.

The bill proposes the formation of a committee made up of a member of the State Planning Board, the Dean of College of Agriculture of Pennsylvania State University, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Environmental Resources, and an active farmer appointed by the Governor.

Heretofore, we all are aware that the condemnation of farm lands to construct super highways was done in a rather arbitrary manner, and we have seen thousands of rich, fertile acres of productive soil become ribbons of concrete. Certainly, we must continue to build and improve our highway networks, but my bill will spur the highway planners to find alternate routes nearby without despoiling the agricultural land.

HB219 is also in the House Agricultural Committee, and my co-sponsors and I are of the opinion it has an excellent chance of becoming law, as more of our colleagues in the urban, non-farm districts are being made aware of man's dependence on the agricultural industry.

Both bills, I believe, use the common-sense approach to meaningful legislation for the farmer, and I will be reporting on several others in subsequent columns.

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