

Conservation

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Association, told the committee that while PFA is opposed to more government regulation, they do realize that some farm owners and operators have a reckless disregard for the soil, and that some of these cases could only be corrected by government imposed actions.

"But," he said, "we'd also

like to point out that farmers share a common goal with DER: preservation and improvement of environmental quality. Indeed, farmers have a vested interest here, and a sincere concern. The environment is the farmer's living. He uses the land, air and water to produce food."

Helm pointed out three major reservations he and the PFA had about the 1977 deadline. He asked:

1 - How will DER deal with those farmers who have applied for a farm conservation plan before the deadline, but have not yet had one designed and implemented because of the demands placed on the under-financed and understaffed Conservation District office?

2 - How does DER plan to educate their field staff on matters of the Erosion

Control Regulations as they apply to agriculture?

3 - In order to adequately judge implementation of a farm conservation plan, one must know something of contemporary agricultural practices. Does DER plan to familiarize their enforcement personnel with this area?

Helm also voiced serious concern over the DER definition of animal wastes as sewage. "Manure is a valuable resource," Helm said, "and any regulations that might prohibit farmers from spreading it on their land - as they've traditionally done - will hurt food production."

There are many farmers opposed to the regulations, Helm noted. "But I think much of the opposition come from the fact that there's a lot of misunderstanding concerning the regulations. Farmers are in favor of sedimentation and erosion control, and they favor an approach similar to DER's. But they definitely don't like

having government agencies telling them what to do. If DER wants to help farmers control sedimentation, then they'll have to do a much better job of communicating with farmers through extension, farm groups and so forth. If there's more communication, I feel certain a lot of the opposition will disappear."

The committee heard from several people during the day that seemed flatly opposed to DER regulation of farm erosion. One was a Franklin County surveyor who told the hearing, "I have yet to talk to anyone who thinks farm pollution is a problem at this time. I think 90 percent of all farmers use some conservation practices, especially on steep slopes and next to waterways. Only on out of ten farmers don't do anything."

Keith Eckle, a Lackawanna County dairy and vegetable farmer, asked the committee, "How much environmental quality can we afford? Who will pay the cost, how much will agricultural production suffer, and who makes the decision as to whether we devote ourselves to clean streams or growing food?"

In Northeastern Pennsylvania, Eckle pointed out, the conservation problem is greatly complicated by the fact that many of the best farmers till considerable acreages of rented land. He said farmers wouldn't be willing to spend money on conservation practices for rented land, nor would landlords who were getting only \$15 to \$20 an acre yearly rental. "Why should a landowner pay for terraces when he's just holding the land for development anyway? Terraces won't increase the value of rental land at all, and they could decrease the resale value. Unless you solve the rented land problem, conservation regulations are going to put a lot of our best farmers out of business."

Eckle also doubted the conservation measures always paid off in production increases or better soils. "If we do as bad a job of farming

as people say we do, we'd have run out of topsoil long ago."

George Wolff, a member of the Lebanon County Conservation District board of directors, defended conservationists.

"I have terraces on my farm because I think they're a definite net worth factor," he said. "The cost of my terraces was minor because

I had them done when the federal government, through the Agricultural

Stabilization and Conservation Service, was paying 80 percent of the bill.

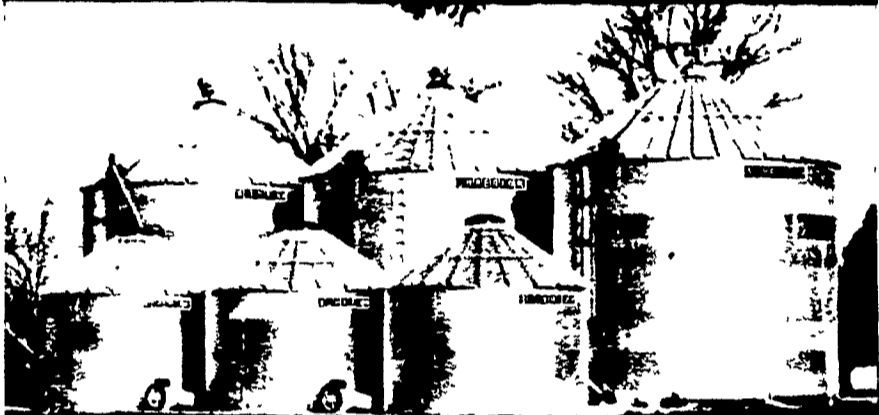
"But farmers don't always need terraces to solve their erosion problems. And for those who do, there will still be money available from Washington for some conservation practices."

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