

Brandt wants farmers to work along Pa. highways

LARRISBURG — Rep. Kenneth E. Brandt, R-Lancaster, will soon introduce legislation proposing that the Department of Transportation be permitted to lease directly to a private entity land owned by the Commonwealth within the right-of-way of a State highway for agricultural purposes.

He explained that his proposal would permit farmers to plant or mow land along Pennsylvania's highways, an idea which would provide the farmers with more land to grow more feed and foodstuffs for the consumers of the Commonwealth and also would relieve PennDot from the added expense of mowing

and maintaining the land along the highways.

Paul Myers, District Superintendent of the highway district which includes Lancaster County, said, "I think it's a great idea which will save PennDot a great deal of money on grass cutting, which could be used for other highway maintenance problems, such as road repairs."

Brandt said, that according to PennDot, Lancaster County alone has 580 acres of mowable turf on multi-lane (4-lane) highways.

"If my legislation is enacted, this land could be maintained by the farmers of the area, giving them more land for growing and

at the same time, helping PennDot in its financial crisis," Brandt said.

Brandt pointed out that bipartisan demands that the Department of Transportation put its house in order before it gets additional State funds have delayed action on bills to raise motor vehicle taxes until the Legislature reconvenes in mid-November.

"PennDot officials claim they need an additional \$200 million in gas taxes and increased registration fees for maintenance and repair of the State highway system," he added.

"They cite inflation as the primary cause, but a close look at the overall spending by the Department during the past four years shows where the major source of inflation has occurred:

"In 1974-75 the cost of actual highway maintenance was \$225 million, up 47 percent since 1970-71. But administrative costs in the maintenance field rose 177 percent during the same period.

"As a result, roads go unrepaired while upper echelon costs rise out of all proportion and the Department itself has become a center of payroll padding, political control, inefficiency, graft and corruption."

Secretary of Transportation Jacob Kassab recently complained publicly about his inability to dismiss Department em-

ployees indicted on criminal charges directly related to their jobs as State employees.

In 1974, a special House investigating committee uncovered a State-wide pattern of graft and kick-backs to highway officials by contractors doing business with the State, and the ultimate cost of such corruption is borne by the taxpayer, the Pennsylvania motorist.

"The Governor has changed his position several times during the past year on the method he favors to raise additional highway revenues," Brandt said.

"First he proposed a \$100 million bond issue for highway maintenance, which would have been unconstitutional; then the use of Federal revenue sharing funds for this purpose and in 1974 the Governor strongly opposed a one-cent increase in the gas tax earmarked for maintenance, which was passed by the Legislature last September.

"In 1975 he is asking for a two-cent increase, from nine to 11 cents a gallon, plus the doubling of auto registration fees, from \$14 to \$28 a year, as well as increases in truck registrations according to their weight."

Recently, House Minority Leader Robert J. Butera, R-Montgomery, called for "major advances in reordering PennDot priorities, built-in safeguards against political corruption, and a much higher degree of ac-

countability to the public and the General Assembly . . ."

Within less than a week two House Democratic leaders joined him with the following statement: "We want firm and specific assurances that these funds will result in some visible improvement in our roads. PennDot has not satisfied us on this point yet."

"Secretary Kassab who has resigned effective

January 1, announced recently that he was working on a plan to cut PennDot personnel by 20 percent, but he can only accomplish this objective if his hands are freed from political interference," Brandt said.

He added that his proposal to free highway funds from use for grass cutting would definitely help in putting PennDot's house in order.



Jane Hill of Kutztown accepted the Beatty H. Dimit plaque on behalf of the Berks County Grange Drill Team. The team, of which she is a member, took first place in state-wide Grange competition this past week. Miss Hill was the state Grange's Youth Princess for 1974-75.

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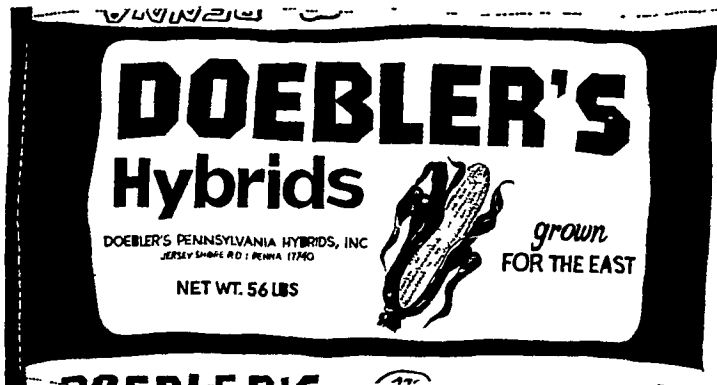


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