

Shelhamer

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complaints and suggestions from Pennsylvania's agricultural interests.

The new secretary of agriculture does not want to run his office single-

handedly, however. While accepting responsibility for final decisions, he says he will not make them without consulting others who can inform him on possible effects of a decision. "It'll be a

team and coach or cabinet type of affair," he explained. "Four, six or 12 heads are better than one," he continued, continually stressing his desire to do the best he can for Pennsylvania agriculture.

Shelhamer was confirmed to the top ag post on Monday afternoon by a vote of 47 to 0. The legislative action gave the state its first permanent secretary of agriculture in more than a year, bringing to an end the controversial issue surrounding former ag secretary James McHale, who was replaced a year ago by Acting Secretary of Agriculture Raymond Kerstetter. Kerstetter resigned on Jan. 14. A day later Governor Milton Shapp appointed Shelhamer acting secretary of agriculture. The senate approved the appointment on Monday and thus closed an unusual chapter in the history of the state's agriculture department.

Shelhamer professes a solid faith in farm people. As an example of that, he described one of his personally recruited and trained aids - Neil Buss, a

former Lehigh County agent, who comes from a farm, earned his Ph.D. and "never really got both feet out of the barnyard," according to Shelhamer. On the latter, he emphasized "I think that's a plus, not a minus."

The new ag secretary does not personally believe that a formal education is necessary to serve in his department. "Too much precedent has been put on that sometimes," he stated. "It doesn't hurt to have a Ph.D.," he added, "but I'm not necessarily dazzled by it."

Showing his identity with a down-to-earth philosophy some more, Shelhamer said: "The problem with too much professional education is that those kind of people sometimes forget how farmers do things. There's too much theory. There's a time when you must take your dreams and theories and come down to reality and practicality."

Applying his philosophy to a broader spectrum, Shelhamer opined that "probably every department in government would benefit

from this type of 'medical check-up'."

In this month's issue of the Agriculture News Bulletin, published by the Department of Agriculture in Harrisburg, the new secretary is introduced in the following words:

Shelhamer is the first Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary to come from the ranks of the legislature with long-term service, and he feels his experience in the House will help him in his job at Agriculture.

"I am in a unique position," Shelhamer said, "to tell the farmers story and to take the necessary steps to dignify our farmers and improve their economic condition. I want to make the public aware of the common interests between our farmers and consumers. When we realize that we are all partners in progress, we will begin to see some action which will benefit all of us, not just special interests."

Shelhamer said he hoped that under his direction, the Department would "expand our services to the public even beyond our already well-established regulatory efforts."

While proud of his farm background and considering it a strong asset, Shelhamer also values the 12 years of experiences he has had in the legislature. And he admits to being a politician. Although "officially" a Democrat, he says he'll run his office on a bipartisan basis. "I don't want the Department of Agriculture to be bogged down with partisan issues," he told Lancaster Farming.

"I'm conservative for a Democrat, and most farmers are conservative," Shelhamer remarked. "Some would think I'm more Republican than Democrat," he continued, stressing that the "right kind of registration" will have very little to do with job qualifications in his department. Summarizing his views on that subject, Shelhamer said "I'm a politician, I know the system and I respect the system."

As secretary of agriculture, Shelhamer has two top priority projects. The first is to promote area marketing by farmers themselves. As a fruit grower, Shelhamer has had considerable experience along that line. "I was born and raised by a Dutch father," the farmer-legislator-ag secretary said. "We were taught to always strive for quality. After you've grown it (your product) you have to convert it to cash. Marketing has been strongly overlooked in the past. Pennsylvania is an unusual state, with many medium and small-sized operations. We're diversified. If we're going to

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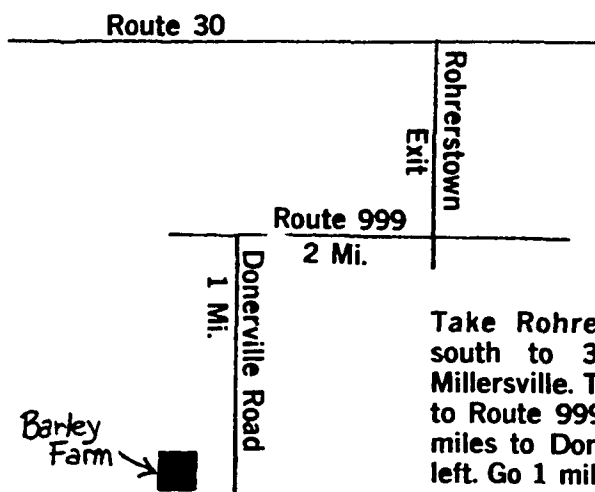
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