

Agricultural zones

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, December 31, 1977-21

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audience revealed that most of the farmers were uncertain how an agricultural district would affect them and their livelihood.

Amos Funk, a Manor Township farmer and chairman of the state Land Use Committee, was on hand to help clarify what such a

move would mean. He told those assembled, "We have the best land in the United States. We need encouragement to make a commitment (to keep the land in farming)."

Funk defined "encouragement" in terms of legislation designed to make it profitable for a farmer to keep his land in agriculture

and not be forced to sell it to a developer to finance his retirement.

"The only retirement we have is land," said Funk. "Farmers need compensation to make up for a pension plan."

The "economic incentives" he had in mind were the kind that come from the state, through

taxes. He suggested that if one-half of one percent of real estate transfer taxes were earmarked for the purpose, \$15 million would be available for the state to purchase development rights from farmers who would have voluntarily signed away their right to sell their farms to developers for a set period of time. In New York state, farmers who sign such an agreement are bound to keep their land in agriculture for

eight years. After that they are again free to sell to developers.

In Pennsylvania, Act 319, the "Clean and Green" Act, allows farmers to sign a similar agreement giving them preferential tax treatment. Their land then is taxed at values lower than developmental land values.

In Lancaster County, few farmers have signed, said Funk, because the legislation makes little if any difference in their taxes.

But, he noted, in the near future, farmland will be reassessed at higher values, and then 90 per cent of the farming population will benefit from signing the "Clean and Green" agreement, he estimated.

A man who identified himself as Rick Claffey, a developer, told the group, "It's time for farmers and developers to quit being at odds and start working together."

Claffey said if farmers would sell to developers rather than agreeing to sell development rights to the state, they would reap more profits as well as help save farmland because private developers tend to build for density, thereby preserving farmlands that would be lost to the spread of less dense developments. He added that if developers purchased the lands, money for development would come from private sectors, not from taxes.

Funk made the point that tax breaks would give farmers the option of continuing to produce during periods of low profits and remain in farming until such time when it becomes a more lucrative means of making a living. As an example of a highly profitable future farm product, he mentioned the fact that experiments are being conducted on oil producing crops which would return the farmer high profits.

Several farmers expressed reluctance at being coerced into an agreement that would limit their freedom to sell land.

Funk emphasized that legislation would provide for a voluntary program allowing farmers the choice of selling their lands or preserving them for agricultural use. Farmers could band together to form an agricultural district where everyone agreed to keep the area in farming, he said.

In Warwick Township, farmers could begin by advising township officials to pass an ordinance creating an agricultural zone, said Funk. It wouldn't be as strong a measure as state legislation providing economic incentives, he added, but it would be a start and would limit that area to farms and related agribusinesses.

"We can't get anything in return at this point in time," he told the gathering; "you'd just be doing it because (you) feel it's the right thing to do."

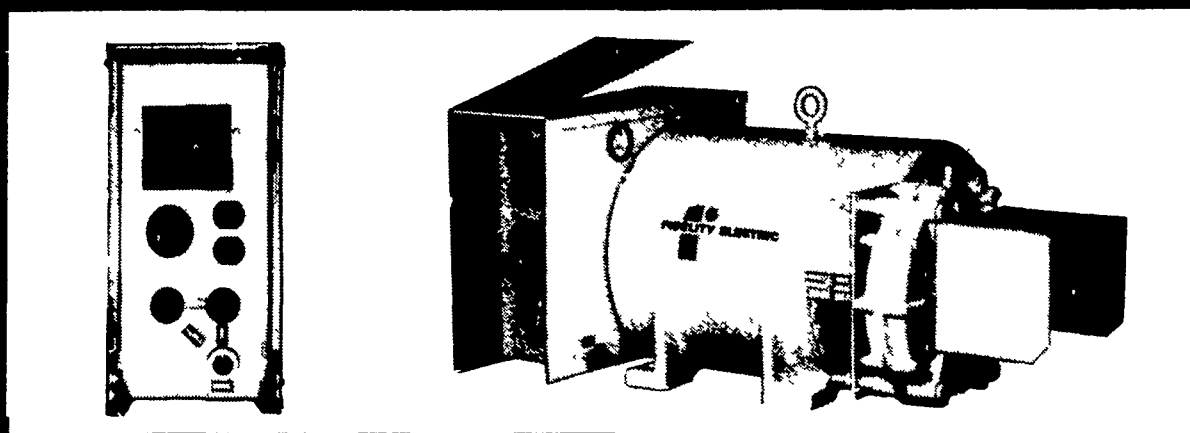
Before adjourning the meeting, members of the planning commission asked for volunteers to form a five-man committee to study the feasibility of establishing an agricultural zone in Warwick Township. David Landis, a member of the planning commission and a farmer, was chosen to serve as liaison between the committee and the planning commission.

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