

Washington lobbyists include farmers' interests

NEWARK, Del. - The concept of paid lobbyists working behind the scene on behalf of farmers may be offensive to some farm folk. But nonetheless, it does go on. Farm lobbying is done on a grand scale with varying degrees of effectiveness, and it's done by very slick PR people and by just plain farmers.

How much farm lobbying goes on in Washington is hard to pin down. One report indicates that farm organizations, associations and others interested in influencing farm legislation spend about 10 million dollars a year in Washington toward that end. Some of that money comes directly from farmers' pockets in the form of dues or other membership fees. Other funds for lobbying are provided to the many agricultural trade associations by agribusiness interests.

Some of the farm organizations claim to do very little lobbying and devote a very small part of their total budget to this end.

Others admit to the lobbying function as an important part of what they do and why they're headquartered in Washington and they claim a sizable expenditure. Here are some examples:

The National Council of Farmer Cooperatives spends more than \$327,000 a year on lobbying. It counts everything - secretarial salaries, postage, telephone calls, anything remotely connected to the lobbying effort. On the other extreme the National Farmers Organization says it spends less than \$10,000 a year on lobbying. Other examples - The National Farm Bureau's annual bill is \$178,000; the National Grange, \$66,000 and the National Milk Producers, \$22,000.

Lobbying may not be the dirty business that it has been pictured to be, but it still conjures up a dark image that many farmers would just as soon not be associated with. As independent businessmen they like to think what they do is all out in the open for everyone to see and yet the

associations and organizations that they belong to are very much involved in lobbying. In fact, some of those groups exist for no other purpose than to influence legislators, keep an eye on the agencies that affect their interests, and suggest ways that Washington can serve their members better. While other services may be offered by these organizations they are usually not the main reason why they exist. Consider this. Why would any farm organization in its right mind want an office in Washington if it weren't trying to involve itself in the legislative process?

Farm lobbying is a difficult job at best because of the diverse interest of agriculture. How can a lobbyist for the Farm Bureau, for instance, represent the interest of so many different farmers and ranchers? Legislation aimed at raising grain prices may be hurting livestock farmers and so the lobbyist is caught in the middle. On the other hand, the special

interest lobby such as the National Association of Wheat Growers, has a pretty clear picture of where its members stand on such legislation.

Sometimes the various lobbying groups can get together and form a coalition. An example is the Pesticide Users Conference. This is a group that includes representatives of the major farm and commodity organizations as well as pesticide manufacturers. They've been working together over several years, trying to bring some order to the chaos of pesticide legislation.

Even though formal coalitions do not exist, on many efforts there is a getting together over lunch or by telephone so that the farm lobbyists know where each other stands. There's really nothing more awkward than two groups that claim to represent the same basic interests arguing on both sides of an issue.

Farm lobbyists provide a very valuable service - that is to make lawmakers aware

of the impact of what they're legislating. So often a Congressman votes on a bill without fully understanding what it will do. It's the lobbyist's job to make that Congressman aware before he votes of how such action will affect a particular group. Congressmen like to know what the grass roots farmer thinks about an agricultural issue, and the easiest way for them to get that information is through the farm organization's headquarters in the nation's capital. Many of these organizations avoid the slick professional lobbyist, preferring instead to be represented by elected farmer officers who speak as farmers and for farmers. They more nearly reflect the attitudes out in the country and they're more believable.

The American Agriculture movement was able to capitalize on this freshness. When it came to town, its members piloting farm tractors and wearing the familiar farm caps,

Congressmen had no trouble believing these chaps. American Agriculture's lobbying efforts, as rough as they seemed, were pretty darned effective. I doubt they could have paid a lobbyist to do that job for them.

The farm lobbying business continues to thrive and grow in the nation's capital. The number of active lobbyists seems to increase as the momentum picks up on key agricultural issues. Then, with the passage of something as important as the farm bill, many of those lobbyists pack their suitcases and head back to farm country. Others hang around town on a regular basis dealing with the alphabet agencies and making sure that their constituents aren't caught flatfooted on Capitol Hill.

One of the major cries from farmers is the need for understanding and those lobbyists do their part to see that farmers are understood by a very important group.



Pigeon Hill Farm wins Hereford show

SYRACUSE, N.Y. - Pigeon Hill Farm of Abbottstown, Pa. with a single entry walked off with the top honors, senior and grand championship in the Hereford show at the New York State Fair.

The heifer, a spring yearling, is PH Miss Northern 77 and is out of GK Northern 424E.

Glenn Klippenstein of Maysville, Mo., nationally known Hereford breeder, judged the Hereford breeding classes at the Syracuse show.

Millborn Farm of Sherborn, Mass. had the reserve champion heifer, MBF Li Miss Sam 372.

Dr. Timothy Dennis of Penn Yan, N.Y., had the senior and grand champion bull with RH Prospector 7002 and the junior bull champion with JC Come Along 148.

Powisset farm of Dover, Mass. exhibited the best six head and Millborn Farm was named both Premier Breeder and Premier Exhibitor.

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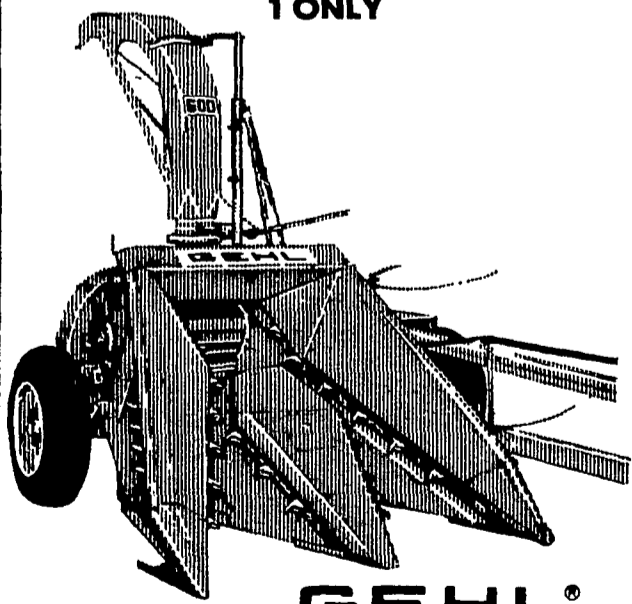
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