

Robin Ream works with land-use problems

By SALLY BAIR
Staff Writer

LANCASTER — "This is the best thing that's happened to me. It has broadened my horizons so much." Robin Ream is talking about his CETA-financed position with the Penn State Extension Service in Lancaster and Lebanon counties. Ream was hired last February as an Extension assistant in land use and has spent the last nine months learning about the problems and trying to work with local planning commissions to help solve some of the problems facing the two counties.

Despite some disappointment in his inability to work more closely with local bodies, Ream is optimistic about the potential for preserving farmland. "Now is the time to preserve it," he states emphatically.

He added, "In the beginning I didn't know about zoning, and I didn't know what I should be doing. I spent a lot of time reading and getting familiar with zoning and taxation."

After studying the situation, he says, "I think I've made up my mind that agricultural land should be preserved through zoning. That is the best way to deal with the problem." It is not that he opposes such ideas as the purchase of development rights, but he feels that it is too expensive and complicated. Zoning is easily understood.

While almost every township has some kind of agricultural district designated, Ream said only seven or eight of the 41 townships in Lancaster

County have "true, planned agricultural districts." Zoning can work, he feels, because people are more aware of the issue today. "We are to the point now that we should start watching land, and be more aware and not allow changes in zoning. If municipalities will adopt strong agricultural districts and stick with it, it can work."

Ream encourages people to get involved if they have strong feelings about the way they want their townships zoned. "People must show the planning commissions and the supervisors that they are interested. Zoning is controlled locally, and local people should get involved and have a say."

Limiting or stopping growth is not the answer to the problem. Ream stated, "It would be detrimental to Lancaster to limit growth, but growth and development must come in the right places, or we are in danger of losing our best farmland. If we could preserve the green belts that we now have, we'd be living in a better place." I think we can do it. I also think that one of the best things that has happened here is the renovation of downtown Lancaster." Ream said that there is a lot of land that could sensibly be filled in around the city to take care of the "natural expansion" before encroaching on outlying areas of good land.

He pointed out that development is not always the bargain some township officials and residents may feel it is. "Study after study shows that development is more costly than it is worth. If it is phenomenal what it costs to provide police,

sewer lines, upkeep on streets and education."

Ream said his first reaction to the new proposal of the County Commissioners to use deed restrictions as a means to preserve farmland was that it was too expensive. But he feels it is good to have the committee working on the problem as a means of "pointing more attention to it. It will make people more aware of it." He said that in reading accounts of the appointments, he was struck by Amos Funk's statement that the idea is so simple it just might work. Upon reflection, he said he agrees with that sentiment.

Recently Ream helped a workshop designed to give municipal leaders a chance to hear success stories from townships which have successfully dealt with the preservation problem. He said, "We had four very interesting people tell their story, and I was surprised at the response and the number of municipalities represented." Now he hopes the response will be action by those who do not have an agricultural zoning law.

Ream predicted that the problem of neighbors complaining about agricultural odors and other nuisances will probably get worse, unless ag districts are created and adhered to. He said, "I don't know what to do about it except to zoning to prevent it."

While Ream, who lives in Kleinfeltersville, divides his



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