

PFA discussed land use and legislative policy

By JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent
LANCASTER - While "politics" is considered a hands-off issue with some farmers, many realize that, like it or not, governmental

involvement is part of American agriculture today. Working within the political framework is a foundation of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association, the state's largest farm organization.

"Legislation that is good for the farmers is good for the rest of the population," is a philosophy of the PFA, which has gained the support of the General Assembly for 85 per cent of their favored bills in the Senate and 82 per cent in the House.

In an effort to maintain personal contact and the exchange of information with lawmakers, PFA has established legislative action committees at both state and national levels. Legislative committee members of District 8, which encompasses Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties, met last week at the Dutch Town and Country Restaurant to study goals and implementation of political activity.

Carolyn Rutter, of Dover, the District 8 director, and Chet Heim, PFA's director of public affairs, led the morning legislative study with about 40 committee workers in attendance.

"This session of the General Assembly promises to be an interesting one; we can't even figure out who the leaders are going to be," noted Heim, commenting on the heated battles that have raged across the state over key elected seats.

Under the constitution of

Pennsylvania, any legislation must receive a majority of the votes of all elected House and Senate members to become law, not just a majority of the representatives in attendance at a session. Therefore, to pass any bill, support must be garnered for 102 members of the House and 26 of the Senate.

Because of the changes made in proposed bills as they pass through the branch committees, hearings, debates and amending processes, PFA legislative committeemen were reminded to always use both the bill number and the printers' number, if known, when contacting elected representatives.

A session on land use policy was featured during

the afternoon training schedule. PFA legislative specialists expect that agriculture land preservation will be a front-runner issue in the upcoming months of General Assembly sessions. Viewing some type of land use policy as inevitable, PFA is supporting comprehensive land use planning which considers farmland of prime importance, and is geared toward preserving the state's agriculture industry by preserving all classes of farmland.

"We're failing to think long enough ahead in the future on the land use issue," asserted Ralph McGregor, York County dairyman who chaired the land use session. McGregor, of East Berlin, is the district's representative

to PFA's state land use committee.

The organization's policy of land use is based on maintaining all agriculture land through voluntary programs, run under local control, with the option of selling development rights on property set aside within established ag-land preserves. Under proposed guidelines, no mass building could ever take place on land on which developmental rights had been sold.

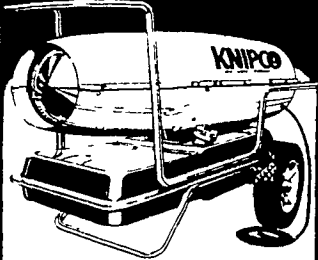
Theoretically, a property owner would have already lost his development potential by enrolling his acreage in an agriculture preserve; and the sales of development rights to local municipalities would compensate him for the loss

of future gains on the land's development value.

Developmental rights could also be retained and held for possible later sales as values on comparable development acreage increases. Or, the rights might be sold to a third party, where they could be resold, or held for speculation against future land value increases.

Monies for the purchase of the rights may remain the biggest problem confronting the land use issue. Funds for such purchases might be raised by either property transfer levies, or bond issues. In light of growing taxpayer rebellion, however, money for farmland preservation may discourage any quick legislative solutions.

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FmHA loans available for farmers

HARRISBURG - Local county offices of the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) now have loans available for low-income farm families, with implementation of the "limited resource" farmer authority of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978, according to State Agriculture Secretary Kent D. Shelhamer.

The new loan program will provide credit at reduced interest rates to low-income families for real-estate, construction and production expenses, where farm operations and resources are

so limited that they cannot afford the regular rates of interest for FmHA loans.

Limited resource borrowers of farm real estate or operating loans will be allowed to defer beginning repayment, if necessary, until three years after receiving their loans.

Shelhamer praised the new loan program, calling it a "potential boost for our young farmers just entering the business, as well as the many others who have been unable to build their farms up to make an adequate living."

Under the limited resource loan program, real estate loans for purchase or improvement of land and buildings will carry a three per cent interest rate for the first three years of repayment and then five per cent the following two years. After the first five years, borrowers will pay whatever rate they can afford, not less than five per cent, nor more than the maximum interest rate normally applies to FmHA farm loans (currently 8½ per cent).

Limited resource loans for production expenses will

carry a five per cent interest tag during the first two years, with borrowers reaching higher rates up to FmHA maximums as their operations improve. Borrowers' ability to pay higher interest rates will be reassessed every two years after the initial repayment period.

Shelhamer said that the program should open up a new means of finance to farmers who could not previously qualify for other farm credit. More information is available through local FmFH offices.

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