

# Shelhamer reviews his experience in government

**Editor's Note:** This is the second of two installments on Kent Shelhamer, former secretary of agriculture for the state of Pennsylvania. Shelhamer, a 12-year veteran of the State Legislature, returned to his Columbia County farm last week when the Thornburgh Administration took charge of Pennsylvania's government.



Kent Shelhamer says farmers should become more involved in politics. If they don't, then others will make decisions for them. He also notes that not every politician is dishonest. "Just because a man goes to church, that doesn't make him holy. The same is true in government," he says.

By DIETER KRIEG

HARRISBURG — Kent Shelhamer held open the door to his roomy office in the Department of Agriculture, extended a hand in my direction, and welcome me. I took a chair in front of his desk. So did he. His own chair behind the desk remained empty. Right or wrong, I took the gesture as one which removed the intangible barrier often associated with officials.

Kent Shelhamer was a secretary of agriculture who didn't mind doing such menial tasks as shoveling snow. His philosophy was (and still is) that a person should be willing to do what needs to be done, and what he expects others to do. While he recognized that he had more important things to do than to exercise with a shovel in hand, he didn't place himself above such small duties.

Kent Shelhamer, who served as Pennsylvania's secretary of agriculture for two years, firmly believes that top people in any field are far more understanding, unassuming and human than their counterparts. He also believes that "the Good Lord prepares you for your work."

In his own case, he believes he was well prepared for the top ag post because of his leadership in the House Agriculture Committee, on which he served for a dozen years. "During those 12 years I had on-the-job training for my post as agriculture secretary," he told Lancaster Farming in a recent interview. Also, he became well acquainted with the budget. His familiarity with government channels and key people enabled him to have effective programs, he said.

Shelhamer places considerable importance in having a good understanding with the State Legislature. It's


necessary, he says, to have good funding. On the other hand, he admits that his funding this past year was "very low" despite his familiarity with that government body. Appropriations for the Department of Agriculture need the support of leaders in the House Agriculture Committee, he pointed out.

Shelhamer's Department was, of course, not alone in facing budget cuts. Pennsylvania's monetary crisis has


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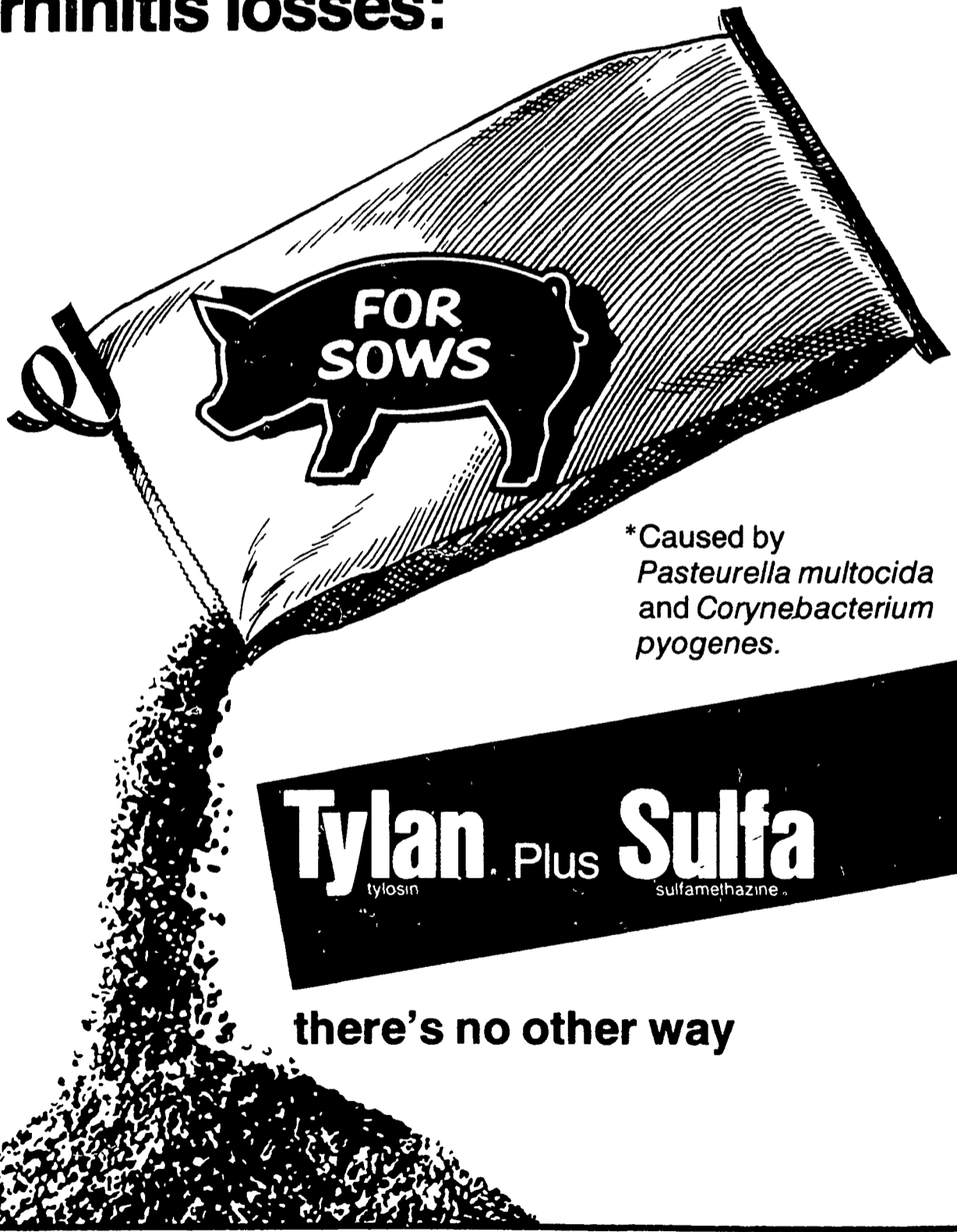


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