

Legislative roundup

Welfare farms to transfer to PDA

By DICK WANNER
HARRISBURG — Lots of behind the scenes action this week in the Capitol as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Public Welfare and the Department of Justice all took careful looks at House Bill 1535, a lands management bill, which would transfer responsibility for state-owned farmland from Welfare to Agriculture.

Welfare farms are all just outside state hospitals, and for many years were tended by patients who grew food for the people living in the hospitals.

Court rulings over the past decade have virtually eliminated stoop labor therapy, and the Welfare farms are now being run out of a department headed by a

secretary, Helen O'Bannon, who thinks they'd be better placed with the secretary of agriculture.

Governor Thornburgh is in agreement with his welfare chief, and so is Secretary of Agriculture Penrose Hallowell. It will be a complicated transfer involving thousands of acres, millions of dollars worth of equipment and buildings, and 135 state employees, most of

whom are members of the American Federation of State and Municipal Employees

Agriculture has also announced its willingness to accept any lands deemed surplus by the Department of Justice, which operates farms in conjunction with a number of the state prisons.

Justice's farm chief, Robert Williams, does not believe they will be declaring any lands surplus. And while he feels the Welfare farms might be better placed with the Department of Agriculture, he does not believe the prison farms, with their convict labor force, should be taken out of the Department of Justice.

Noxious Weed Bill

A Grange supported measure which has yet to be assigned a bill number would simplify the mechanism for pinning noxious weed labels on really troublesome plant pests.

Presently, the legislature must approve and the governor must sign noxious weed legislation.

That is a cumbersome system, at best, and probably accounts for the fact that only one weed, Canada thistle, holds the solitary distinction of being an official public enemy.

State Grange Master Charles Wismer would like to see multiflora rose and johnsongrass added to that list. Incredibly enough, Wismer said, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is still selling multiflora rose plants for use as wildlife shelters.

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A casual observer's impressions of state government as slow and unwieldy could have been shattered in a meeting on Monday in the office of Senate Ag Committee chairman Pat Stapleton.

The meeting was lightning-fast and efficient. It opened at noon and adjourned ten minutes later after the committee members present had voted to put on the floor of the Senate three different bills.

They were:

Clean and Green

House Bill 725 would amend Act 319, the Clean and Green Act, to allow preferential tax treatment to continue when forest or farmland is divided for sale as long as the parcels sold continue in open space uses. The measure passed the House by a vote of 164 to 5 on October 31.

Alien Ownership

HB 1778 would restrict the acquisition of farmland by non-citizens. Neither alien nor foreign governments could acquire an interest in any agricultural land exceeding 100 acres. Passed the House on December 5 by 185 to 4 vote.

Inheritance Taxes

HB 1176 would amend Act 319, Clean and Green again, to allow use value assessment, rather than market value, at the time an estate is settled. It would provide safeguards to insure that the land would continue in agriculture. Passed the House on October 23 by 140 to 42 vote.

Lancaster Co. highest in state

Beef referendum registration nears 10,000

HARRISBURG — The number of eligible farmers who registered to vote in the upcoming beef referendum totalled 9790 on Thursday morning, reported Richard Pennay, Agricultural Program Specialist for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

The registration period officially closed Wednesday afternoon.

Although their normal records management system required them to discard the 1977 referendum files, Pennay said he feels the turnout for this referendum exceeded the previous one.

The county with the largest number of registrants was Lancaster County, with 479 cattle

owners. The next highest number was in Franklin County, where 375 people signed up to vote.

Pennay noted the big days were Monday through Wednesday of this week, even though the registration period began on January 28.

"In Lancaster County, for example, there were less than 100 registered last Friday, and now there are close to 500," Pennay added.

Most of those who registered to vote in the Beef referendum requested to use the mail ballots. Pennay said the county ASCS offices are busy getting ready to send out the ballots and the rules for the voting period of February 19-22.

Several other county totals

are: Berks - 320; Lebanon - 169; Dauphin - 104; Chester - 110; Adams - 207; York - 300; Cumberland - 213; Butler - 223; Bradford - 210; and Washington - 297. SM.

USDA seeks to change foreign disclosure act

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Proposed changes in regulations governing the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act—which would alter the reporting requirement for foreign investors—were announced Friday by Ray Fitzgerald, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

Fitzgerald said one change would raise from five to twenty percent the aggregate foreign interest in a company. That would constitute "significant interest or substantial control," and make clear that when regulations refer to a "combination," they mean only a group of individuals or

governments who are acting in concert.

The other change would generally exempt all agricultural, forestry and timber land not exceeding 10 acres in the aggregate from reporting requirements. However, if products grown on these under-10-acre tracts yield annual gross sales of more than \$1000, the land must be reported to ASCS, Fitzgerald said.

Fitzgerald said the public is invited to comment on the proposals which appeared in the January 25 Federal Register. Deadline for submitting written comments is March 25.

Comments should be addressed to the administrator, USDA-ASCS, Room 218-W, P.O. Box 2415, Washington, D.C. 20013.

Kennedy to manage local soybean office

HEBRON, Md. — Jerry Kennedy of Hebron, Maryland, has been named field services regional manager by the American Soybean Association according to Jeffrey W. Gain, ASA executive director of Government Relations and Field Services.

In his new position, Kennedy will assist state soybean associations and promotion boards in their activities and programs.

The newly created regional office will be located in Salisbury, Maryland, and will work with soybean organizations in Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

Kennedy assumed his duties with the American Soybean Association last Friday.

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