

Regional RCA meeting has small public input

LANCASTER — The public turn-out for a recent US Department of Agriculture regional public meeting was far from encouraging.

In an effort to find out what people would like the USDA to do about its conservation program, 18 regional meetings throughout the United States were scheduled for late February and March to discuss the Resources Conservation Act.

Lancaster County was the host for one of the eighteen RCA meetings, but at an afternoon and evening session, only a couple dozen people participated. According to a public information specialist for the USDA Soil Conservation Service in Harrisburg, there was only one non-USDA person at the evening meeting.

The spokesman for SCS, who did not say the meeting was disappointing or an indication of public apathy, said instead he hoped the reason people weren't at the regional meeting is because they are planning to attend their local county RCA meetings.

Amos Funk, the Lancaster County Conservation District vice-chairman, attended the meeting and made a statement for himself. He said that from the national appraisal there should be ample evidence to indicate that conservation expenditures are economically feasible, and that there is a need for suitable funding.

Funk pointed out that this adequate funding hasn't

been the case for the past ten years and the funds need to be adjusted for inflation. He pointed out the drop in federal financial aid for technical assistance to land owners, research, and cost-shares for conservation measures for land owners.

Funk went on record as saying he thinks the U.S. is beginning to see the need for the solar collecting capability of land through the cultivation of crops. He also stressed the possible conflict in land use when it comes to food, feed, energy, and housing.

Robert Yunker, a dairy farmer and director for the Wyoming County Conservation District, travelled to the regional meeting to speak on behalf of New York State's Conservation District Associations.

Yunker cited their concern that the Northeast doesn't receive the financial support needed for conservation, along with their recommendations for USDA to consolidate its programs through reorganization. He added that the USDA must put more effort into information and education activities.

Others who testified at the public meeting included John Lacey, representing New York's Soil and Water Conservation Service, and Patrick Lantz, representing the Pa. Bureau of Forestry's state forester.

The regional meeting was open to anyone throughout the U.S. to attend, noted the SCS public information

specialist. He added that someone could have attended all eighteen meetings nationwide. All the comments will be considered when they reach their Washington destination sometime in April.

The closest regional meeting to the Lancaster one was held in the nation's capital. The Lancaster meeting was scheduled to accommodate primarily those people living in Ohio, New York, West Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey, according to the SCS spokesman.

Ralph J. McCracken of the RCA information team explained that at a national press conference in Washington, D.C., M. Rupert Cutler, USDA Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, said that "Conservation of soil and water resources is one of America's major environmental issues."

McCracken added, "Dr. Cutler noted that a recent Lou Harris Poll of 7,000 Americans conducted for USDA, found that most

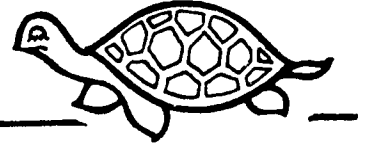
Americans consider the misuse of our soil and water resources a serious problem."

That finding, he said is backed up by the physical data compiled during the recent USDA appraisal for our nation's nonfederal soil, water, and related natural resources. For example: two billion tons of soil is lost annually by cropland sheet and rill erosion. 97 million acres of cropland are being eroded at more than five tons per acre per year. Three million acres of rural land are being converted to some sort of developed use including one million acres of prime agricultural land lost to development. 500 thousand acres per year of wetlands are being drained and lost including two hundred thousand acres of wet lands lost due to agricultural drainage.

By passing the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 Congress directed USDA to appraise the condition of the Nation's nonfederal renewable resources and proposed alternative conservation programs to guide the nation's future conservation activities, McCracken said.

RCA is not a program, but rather a process designed to help USDA assess its present 34 soil and water conservation programs and recommend a future soil and water conservation policy for America, concluded McCracken.

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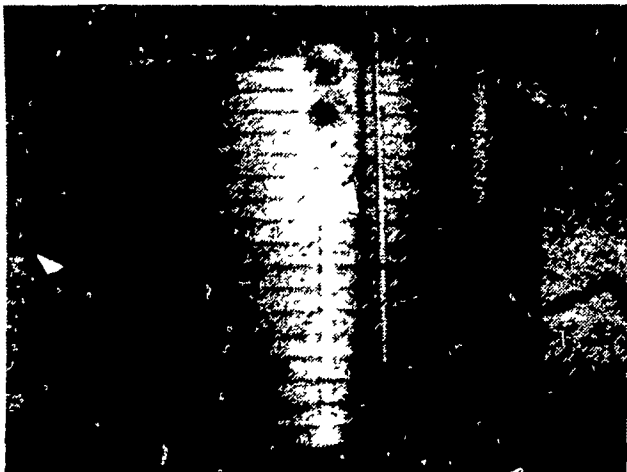
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