

Land preservation first needs a good definition

**BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
WEST CHESTER** — There's a lot of difference between just rural land and farm land.

Likewise, there's as much difference in referring to it as merely land or as soil.

This became readily apparent at the Rural Preservation Conference held by the Chester County Historical Society on Friday and Saturday.

There was a sprinkling of farmer speakers before the predominantly non-farm conference audience. At times, they talked with each other and even questioned each other, but didn't appear

to really get through to each other.

In all, five of the 48 scheduled speakers spread across the two-day conference were billed as having any fulltime active affiliation with production agriculture.

This attendance of invited agriculturalists amounted to slightly better than 10 percent of speaker representation, which admittedly is more than twice the four-percent minority role that farmers now hold in the country's total population.

Despite the conference's general misnomer as

dealing with rural preservation and the sparse agricultural attendance, the program appeared to be centered primarily with soil, not merely land, largely owned by farmers and used by farmers to grow food and fibre as a means of their families' livelihood.

The difference in the approach to the question of how rural preservation should be accomplished was illustrated by the farm and non-farm speakers.

Agricultural spokesmen stressed individual freedoms and the economic aspects of their enterprises, while non-farm speakers talked of such things as open space, scenic vistas and environmental protection.

Charles E. Wismer, Jr., Master, Pennsylvania State Grange, gave his farmer-oriented answer to the problem.

"Farmers need some governmental protection," he said, "but primarily they need to be left alone."

"With the right type of

economy, you won't have to worry about land preservation because it will naturally remain in farming."

Wismer claimed that farmers are facing a 30 percent hike in the cost of inputs for the 1980 planting season due to inflation.

The state grange head also lashed out at the Soviet grain embargo.

"Just don't single out only the farmer," he said.

"Let's have a total embargo. All you're going to see is the big fellow get bigger and the little fellow forced out of business."

Ernest Miller, a dairy farmer from Perry Township, Berks County, called for an end to laws and studies on land preservation since any of them have yet to help find any answers.

He said that legislation such as those forming ag districts just play into the hands of the developers.

"Easements or deed restrictions are the only way

to go to keep the land in agriculture," Miller said.

"Let the land be assessed at its real value and get rid of some of the nuisance laws that interfere with daily farming operations."

The beauty of this, he added, is that the government doesn't get involved.

"Or else, you'll just end up with some more studies," Miller said.

Marshall Haws, of the West Chester Conservation District, called for a return to the "private property ethic."

"Get the government out of the agricultural credit business," he said.

"The government only subsidizes mediocrity and hurts the farmers who are doing a good job."

Among the non-farm speakers at a workshop entitled "An Economically Viable Alternative for Rural Lands" was Darryl Caputo, Executive Director of the Upper Raritan Watershed.

He spoke on the topic of why open space is economically sound. He talked in terms of cluster design, construction on flood plains and protecting the dunes on the coastline of New Jersey.

Caputo said that residential development doesn't pay its own way. The only communities in New Jersey with lower taxes are those with nuclear power plants, he said.

An opening address was given by Robert Gray, Executive Director of the

National Agricultural Lands Study.

This is an 18-month study into the impact of the accelerated loss of farmland. A report is scheduled in January, 1981.

"This is an in-depth look at the problem," Gray said.

"We expect to get something that will even be helpful to state and possibly local governments."

A question from the audience before Gray rushed back to Washington to testify at a hearing asked:

"Is there ever going to be a study that will be of use to the individual farmer?"

A non-committal answer followed.

A total of 15 workshops were held during the conference and were designed to look at rural preservation from the many different viewpoints. Sessions were held on the campus of West Chester State College.

The conference was sponsored by the Chester County Historical Society in association with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

The room containing the conference office had a varied display of preservation literature, including a number of Commission publications that were offered for sale. These covered diverse subjects from Blacksmithing and Homespun Textile Traditions of Pennsylvania Germans to Indian Paths of Pennsylvania and

Regimental Organization and Operations 1776-1783.

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Hunterdon Sheep Club to hold dinner

FLEMINGTON, N.J. — The March meeting of the Hunterdon County 4-H Sheep Club was held at the Montecourt farm in Pat-

tensburg. Demonstrations given were "Fencing" by Denise Holman and Jessica Rieveschl; "Parasites" by Frank Kolandra and John Sebastiano; and "Special

Breeds for Special Wools"; by Kimberly Crommelin and Karen Horvath.

The club's annual April dinner will be held on Saturday, April 12 at the Three Bridges Firehouse. The Deadline for purchasing tickets will be April 5. Reported by Frank Kolandra.

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