



Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

Farmland preservation is just like the weather. Everybody talks about it, and nobody does anything about it. At least that's the way it is in most places.

In Delaware there's been a lot of talk about farmland preservation, but now somebody is doing something about it.

Several months ago, Governor Pete DuPont established an advisory committee on farmland preservation and that committee has been meeting since last spring. Recently it held a series of public meetings aimed at getting reactions to its plan.

That plan could save thousands of Delaware acres from the developer over the next few years.

For a small urban state, Delaware has a lot of farmland. In fact, more than half of its total land area is so listed right now. But the advisory committee thinks the state could lose almost one-fifth of its current land area to development over the next 20 years unless something is done.

So the committee has developed a plan. It involves agricultural zones and financial and other incentives to landowners who keep their acres within those zones.

Briefly, here's how it works. Farmers and other agricultural landowners would receive state income tax credits for those areas located in exclusive agricultural zones. The committee is estimating that a tax credit of \$5 per acre might cost the state as much as \$3 million annually. That's assuming that 600,000 acres of farmland would be in those zones. That's a lot of money, a considerable incentive to farmers, and still the committee feels only a small portion of the state's budget.

According to the plan, farmland placed in those exclusive agricultural zones would be exempt from all general property and school taxes except those directly benefiting agriculture, such as farm drainage taxes. Farm residences, however, would still be subject to the same taxes as neighboring nonfarm residences.

This might result in another \$2 million annual loss of revenues to local governments and school districts.

It's the committee's hope the state would compensate the affected governmental units until those units could develop other ways to raise money.

Another sweetener in the

Farm dams require permits

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources Thursday reminded owners of dams, water obstructions and encroachments that they must have state permits.

Owners of such barriers have until Thursday, Jan. 1,

plan calls for the Delaware inheritance tax on farms in exclusive agricultural zones to be deferred and paid later in installments at low interest.

The committee isn't suggesting that every tillable acre in Delaware be tied up in these agricultural zones. It wants to exclude farmland that is already in the path of urban development.

As a way of encouraging these farms to stay in agriculture as long as possible, the committee is suggesting five-year contracts subject to yearly renewals whereby landowners would agree to stay in agriculture in return for state income tax credits.

There are other provisions in the proposal, some of them farmers will like and some they won't like. That's why public hearings were held.

The committee is now sifting through the information presented at the meetings plus any written statements it received. Then after some rewriting of its draft report, it will send final recommendations to Governor DuPont by the end of the year.

Bear in mind, this is an advisory committee that will simply be making recommendations.

What happens after that will be up to the Governor and the Delaware legislature.

to apply for and secure a permit from the department. DER said that state permits from its predecessor agencies, the former Forests and Waters Department's Water and Power Resources Board and the Water Supply Commission, are valid and owners possessing such permits need not apply.

While permits have been required since 1913, DER was given the right to assess a permit fee by the Dam Safety and Encroachment Act signed November 28, 1978 and amended October 23, 1979. The Environment Quality Board set a sliding schedule of fees for permit applications for dams, en-

croachments, water obstructions, dredging and stream clearance. Fees vary from \$50 to \$200, depending on the extent of the operations.

Detailed information on permit applications is available from DER Bureau of Dams and Waterway Management, Box 2357, Harrisburg, Pa. 17120.

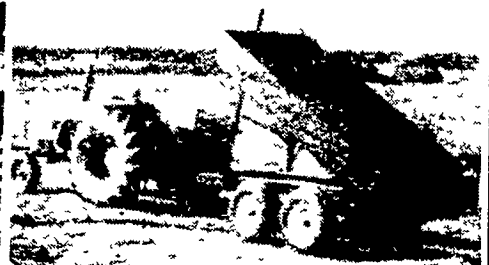
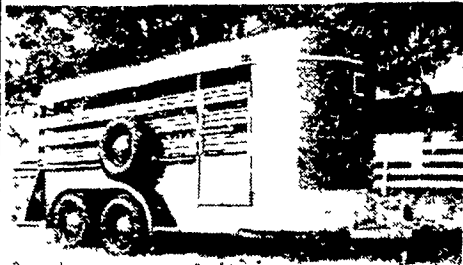
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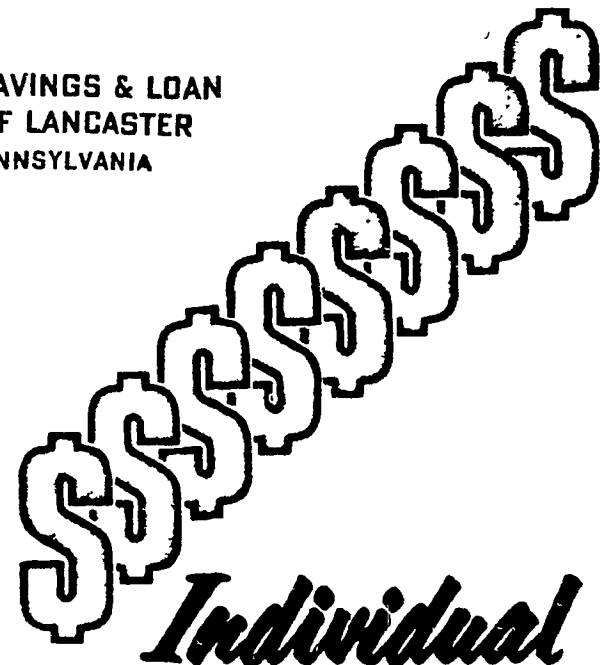
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