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C24-Lancaster Farming, Saturday, February 7, 1981

Farmland preservation to top Ag Department's priorities

HARRISBURG — State Agriculture Secretary Penrose Hallowell Friday told participants in the Agricultural Leadership Seminar that preservation of Pennsylvania's farmlands must become a priority issue for state and local governments in the 1980's.

Speaking to county and township officials, soil conservation district officers and agricultural leaders at the Marriott Inn in Swatara Township, Hallowell said, "National estimates are that 21 percent of Pennsylvania's agricultural lands could be taken out of farming by the year 2000 unless steps are taken now to insure farmers stay in farming

"Agriculture is essential to Pennsylvania, generating over \$25 billion in farm receipts, and supporting a \$20 billion a year agribusiness economy which employs more than 900,000 Pennsylvanians," he said. "Beyond that, our farmlands provide open space for recreation, a solid tax base and protection of environmental and natural resources "

The Agriculture Secretary told the Seminar that conflicts over use of land resource must be settled to balance the needs of farmer and non-farmer, industry and environment

"Nine out of ten land use decisions affect only the local community Local decisions on growth and farming can have a severe impact on our farm families and their lands.

"Urban sprawl has taken over some of Pennsylvania's best farmland," he said "Pressures on farmers from encroaching suburia are greatest in southcentral and southeastern regions of the state, where most our prime agricultural land is located."

The economic pressures, and regulations have put the farmer in a position where he might be better off by selling ins land than by keeping it in farming.

Hallowell noted local decisions on land use, location of new housing and industry, and even nuisance laws can hurt the prospects for farmland preservation, if not carefully considered.

"Loss of our farmlands means a loss of farms, income and production. And that spells troubles in a way of changes in agrelated industry, our tax base, and in the availability of food at a reasonable price."

He told the seminar that the Thornburgh administration has taken "a giant step" in its legislative approach to farmland preservation, recognizing the importance of the farm family in farmland preservation efforts.

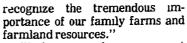
"We will continue to work for legislation which provides the tools for county and local governments to meet their needs. But those needs must be met by the people who are best able to make local decisions for the good of the community."

Hallowell said a survey conducted for the State Planning Board has shown significant public support for local and state farmland preservation efforts.

"Farmland preservation was one of top two priorities for community planning decisions," he said "Among environmental issues, farmland preservation received the top priority, with more than 75 percent of the public voicing support."

Even urban and suburban residents recognize the need to preserve farmlands. "Sixty-nine percent of those living in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and their suburbs gave a top priority to farmland preservation, according to the survey.

"Farmers and non-farmers alike must get a better understanding of the farmland issue," he said. "We are all interdependent, and must

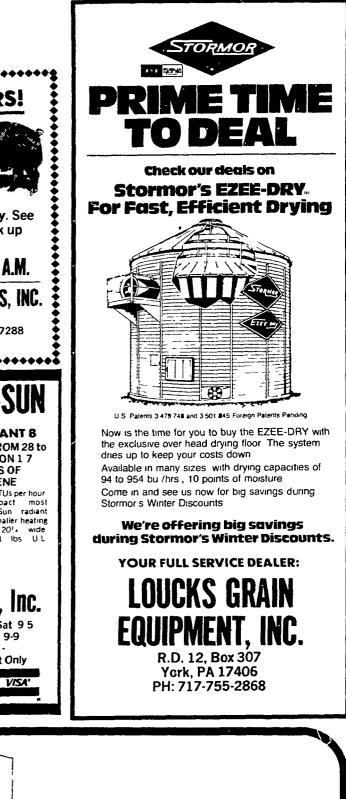


"Working together, we must take action to use the tools



provided by the state on the local level. The preservation of our farmland resources is simply too important a question to be ignored."

Hallowell urged the agricultural leaders to return to their communities, access local needs, and generate public discussion.





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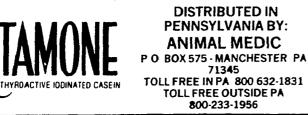
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