

# Odds even for Greenwood vo-ag program

BY SHEILA MILLER

MILLERSTOWN — The odds of Greenwood School District (Perry County) getting their vocational agriculture program back in the classroom are 50-50, according to School Superintendent Richard Wolferd.

Although he is hopeful the program will be reinstated in the curriculum next fall, Wolferd pointed out a lot depends on the availability of funds and what grants and state reimbursement the school receives. A final decision by the school board is expected between the monthly meetings in May and June.

The superintendent pointed out interest in the vocational agriculture program has been great because the school district is in a rural area. He noted 30 students have "expressed a genuine interest" in the vo-ag curriculum for the next school year.

And he stated a newly organized farmers' group, called Greenwood Farmers, has expressed interest in the program.

Getting the vo-ag program back into the Greenwood School District has become an important issue with the farmers of the area, especially since its setback last year.

According to an informed

source, the school district had made plans to start up the vocational agriculture program last Spring. But, with the increased tax load brought on by the construction of a new elementary school, the school board started whittling the budget. One of the programs to be scrapped was the vo-ag program.

Wolferd admitted, "Last year we couldn't swing the vo-ag program financially." The needed funds fell short, despite the federal funds that had been approved for the school's program.

The school district had applied to the state's Department of Education for financial aid. According to a Department spokesperson, the monies had been approved for the vo-ag program but were turned back because of the local money involved.

"It's a touchy situation," said the spokesperson. "The school district is trying to pursue an opportunity for its students which the local taxes won't always permit."

The school district's financial aid applications submitted this year are currently pending review by the Department of Education. Qualified applications will be listed from all 504 school districts, statewide, and projects will be funded in order until the money is

exhausted.

Although administered through the state's Department of Education, the grants are actually federal funds created under the amendments of the Vocational Act, P.L. 94482, explained the spokesperson. These funds are to be used in existing or in creating vocational education programs in local school districts.

The funds are either doled out under entitlement provisions or on a project basis.

Entitlement funds are earned by each school district based on the number of students, wealth of the district, and the amount of poverty existing, explained the spokesperson. In applying for entitlement funds, the school district must tell the state how the funds will be used and what benefits to the students will result. Documentation of the labor market must accompany the application to show students will be educated so they can flow into the labor force — showing they won't be trained for non-existent jobs.

Approval for project funding is done on a priority basis as money becomes available with the school district showing how the project will be done and why it's needed.

In the case of the Greenwood School District, the spokesperson

stressed the vo-ag program is a "true need of the community and has the community's support." Last year funds in both categories of grants were approved for the program, but were rejected because they called for matching funds from the local tax payers.

This year, Superintendent Wolferd stated, the vo-ag program will be implemented unless the school board decides it is economically unfeasible and beyond what the taxing body can stand.

To get the program started, Wolferd said he estimates a cost in the range of \$35,000 for salaries, equipment and summer programs.

"The grants will help us get off the ground the first year, but where do we go for money the second and third years?" he asked. "We need to study this as a long range thing."

Wolferd projected the cost to the school district, even with the federal grants, will be about 3 to 5 mills, at the rate of \$7000 per mil. Currently, the school district's taxes are running at 65 mills, however Wolferd stressed there will be an increase in milage for programs other than the agricultural one.

There used to be a vo-ag program offered at Greenwood during the 1950's, explained

Wolferd, but it was dropped for "lack of interest". He said the popular sentiment of the times was job opportunities were found in the cities rather than on the farms.

Although the cost of reestablishing the program is substantial, a number of farmers say they feel it's worth it.

Dairy farmer Charles Byers of R2 Millerstown stated, "I've been disgusted for the past 20 years — ever since they dropped the vo-ag program in the school. I was always for it and never wanted them to take it out of the school."

Byers said he, personally, will realize no benefit from the vo-ag program if it becomes reality next year. He mentioned his only child is graduating this year. But, he emphasized, a program in agriculture is essential for the Perry County farming area.

As a member of the Greenwood Farmers, Byers said he hopes to help influence the school board's decision to go ahead with the vo-ag curriculum.

But according to Gerald Lyter, president of the school board and 'hobby' farmer, the board needs little persuading.

"We are interested in the agricultural program, and we feel we have the student interest and

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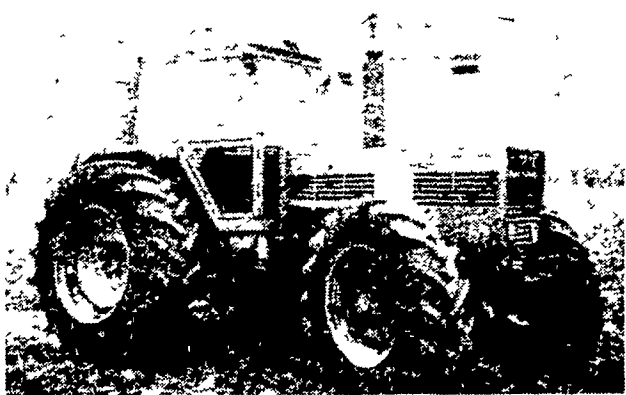
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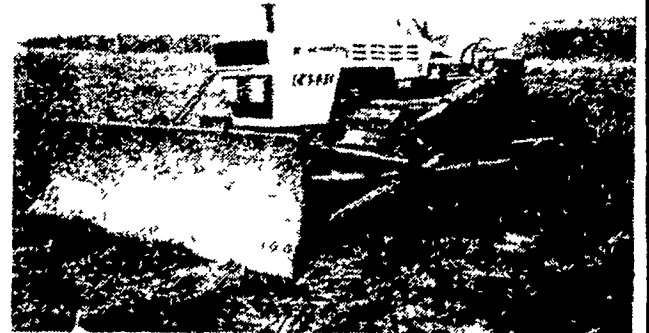
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