

Ag areas, franchise tax head week's activities

HARRISBURG — Some important actions took place here on Capital Hill during the past week, with legislative progress being made on the Ag Areas Bill, the state budget, and House Bill 161.

On Tuesday, H.B. 143 made another step forward on its way to becoming law when the Senate Ag Committee unanimously passed legislation which would make possible the establishment of agricultural districts at the local level and nip nuisance laws in the bud.

According to Linda Boyer, spokesperson for the State Grange in Harrisburg, H.B. 143 was the only bill considered by the Senate Ag Committee on Tuesday.

"It took longer to get a quorum than to pass the legislation out of committee," she chuckled.

H.B. 143 is now on the Senate Calendar to be voted on soon. It is not anticipated the bill will meet

with any problems on its way to the Governor's desk.

Secretary of Agriculture Penrose Hallowell stated he has already signed a letter recommending the Governor sign H.B. 143.

The Senate also passed S.B. 712 — the state budget. A \$200,000 line item was dropped which was earmarked for ag research, including stray voltage.

The budget now moves to Conference Committee where both the House and Senate versions of the budget can be revised, with items added and deleted, or put back in.

House Bill 161, Senator Manbeck's bill, moved favorably out of the House Transportation Committee with a vote of 13-6. Of key importance to the ag community are two amendments attached to the bill, and also passed on Wednesday.

One of these amendments would

allow the transportation of implements of husbandry between farms with just a slow moving vehicle sign on the back of the vehicle during daylight hours. Present law requires lights.

Perhaps even more significant is an amendment just recently attached to the catch-all bill which would impose a franchise tax on oil companies for the maintenance, construction and reconstruction of highways and bridges. This tag on was introduced by Benjamin H. Wilson (R-Bucks) and Samuel E. Hayes, Jr., Majority Leader (R-Parts of Blair, Centre, Huntingdon).

According to Secretary Hallowell, this amendment will raise the money intended to be raised by the SWAP tax. Hallowell stated both he and the Governor support the new franchise tax — switching their support from the SWAP tax.

"This franchise tax will benefit the agricultural and rural communities by raising funds for rural roads and bridges," said Hallowell. "It provides for \$40 million to go to local governments to work on their roads — this wasn't provided in the SWAP tax." Hallowell reminded farmers

their exemptions on gasoline taxes are still in effect.

The proposed franchise tax, he said, is expected to raise \$192 million the first year, with \$63 million going to local governments — a 65 percent increase over funds handed out last year.

"Another advantage to the franchise tax over SWAP is the consumer shouldn't see any im-

pact at the pumps," said Hallowell. "The oil companies may absorb the cost of the tax through deductions in federal income tax due to the excess gas situation. The timing is good."

The final draft of the amendment calls for a 3½ percent tax to be paid by the oil companies for fuel used in transportation.

Rodale tour set

LANCASTER — The Susquehanna Valley Alliance will hold a bus trip to the Rodale Organic Farm and Research Center on Saturday, June 27.

The bus will leave the Lancaster Shopping Center at 8 a.m. and

return by 4:30 p.m. Cost is \$5 per person.

Reservations may be made by calling 394-2782 or 786-4151. Deadline is Wednesday, June 24. A check confirms reservations.

Participants in the tour should take their own lunch.

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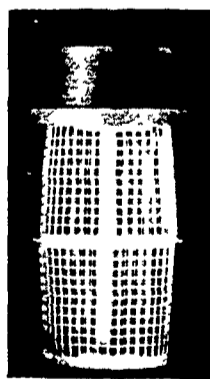
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