

Berks forms Energy Group

BY LAUREL SCHAEFFER
Staff Correspondent

MYERSTOWN — A number of farmers in Berks County, concerned about their land and the protection of their own interests, have recently formed an Energy Group affiliated with the Pennsylvania Farmers Association.

The group's purpose is primarily for negotiating oil and gas leases with interested petroleum companies, explains George Moyer, Myerstown, chairman of the Berks County Energy Group, and to educate landowners so they can better understand the implications involved in these leases.

Moyer, a dairyman whose farm is located between the Blue Mountains and Myerstown was first contacted by an oil company official last February. The oil company was interested in leasing the petroleum rights on his farm for ten years, offering a "sales pitch" that seemed "too nice," Moyer recalls.

Upon finding out that this company and two others were

visiting other farms in the area, Moyer says he contacted the legal service of the Pennsylvania Farmers Association for more information on gas and oil leasing. He wanted to know as much about these leases and land owners rights before considering signing a lease, he recalls.

After several meetings with FFA attorneys familiar with gas and oil leases, Moyer and other concerned farmers have formed the Berks County Energy Group. Presently there are 13 members and several more farmers are planning to join the group, says Moyer.

As members, landowners agree not to sign any oil and gas leases until the energy group has negotiated with the petroleum companies. Attorneys from PFA will act as negotiators for the energy group and prepare lease agreements for individual members. PFA and the group members have voiced their concern that the present leases being offered by the oil and gas companies are "one-sided" being

prepared by the oil companies and are not in the landowners' best interests.

They say landowners should be asking for: better monetary terms; reduction of lease terms from 10 years to 3 years or less; the right to inspect company monthly reports, well records and well meters; proper restoration of the land surface and payment for all damaged land; the right to determine the location of wells, pipelines, access roads and other structures; and the protection against the drainage of oil and gas by wells on neighboring properties.

Moyer emphasizes the energy group is not against leasing land to the oil and gas companies, but for better terms. By forming energy groups, landowners have greater strength in negotiating by controlling larger tracts of land, Moyer explains. Presently the Berks County Energy Group has approximately 2,500 acres of land among its members.

Moyer points out that the three oil and gas companies that he is

aware of have been interested in land laying along the Blue Mountains. Nevertheless anyone in the county can join the energy group, regardless of whether an oil company is interested in leasing their land. Presently PFA has formed energy groups in several other counties which are already negotiating for individual leases.

Membership in the energy group is open to landowners who have paid their PFA membership dues plus an initial membership fee of \$50 to cover expenses of the PFA attorneys working with the group. Once leases have been negotiated and bonus payments have been made by the oil and gas company,

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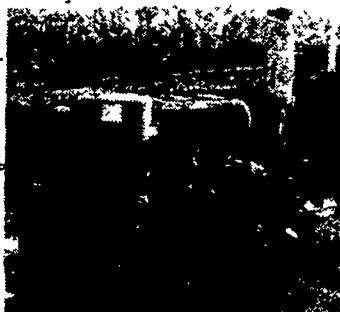


Officers of the recently formed Berks Energy Group include: seated, left, Secretary-Treasurer George Manbeck; Vice Chairman Wilbur Hershey; standing, Chairman George Moyer.

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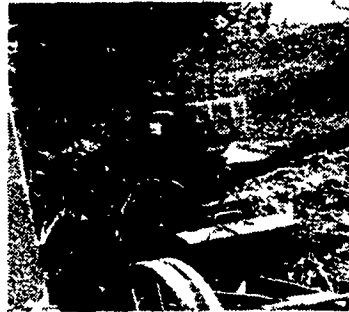
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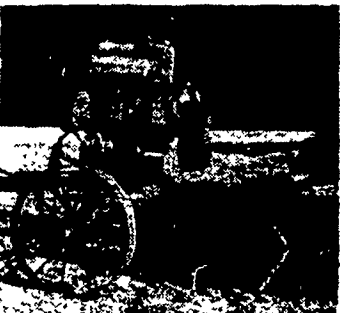
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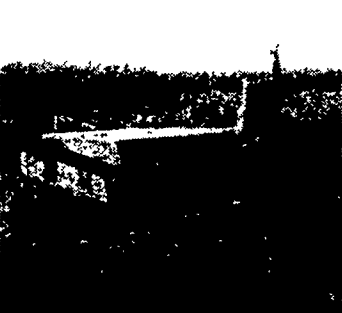
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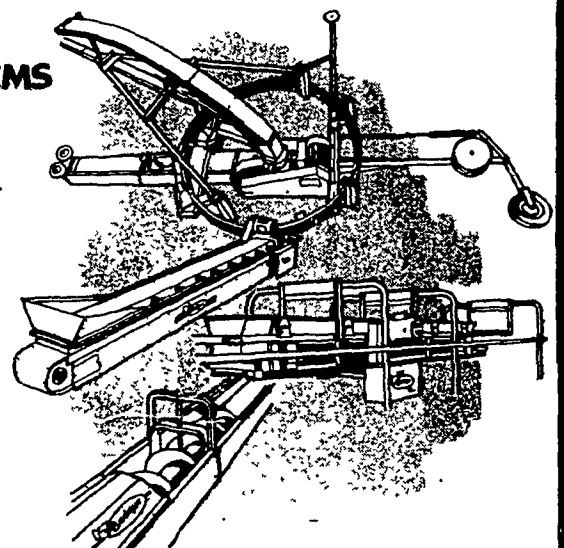
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