

Grange helps initiate new house bills

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania State Grange in cooperation with Representative Carville "Peck" Foster, and other legislative sponsors, is initiating two new House amendments restricting foreign agricultural enterprises in the Commonwealth. The two bills, HB 1751 and 1752 were introduced by Rep. Foster into the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee with amendments urged by the Grange, according to State Grange Master Charles Wismer, Jr.

The legislation will "directly affect the future of the family farmer in Pennsylvania," Wismer announced at a press conference held recently at the Capitol Rotunda in front of a large group. One of the amendments will

change the Agricultural Land Acquisition by Aliens Law of April 6, 1980, Sec. 1 (HB 1752): The amendment would limit the current allowed 100 acres to 10 acres for foreign investor acquisition of agricultural lands, except in the instance of "acquired by demise or inheritance, and such as may be held as security for indebtedness."

"Agricultural land is a natural resource, and should be owned only by U.S. citizens. Foreign-owned farm land also adds to our farmer's competition and surpluses," Wismer commented.

House Bill 1751, The Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority Act, has been introduced to Ag. Committee also by Rep. Foster with an exclusion for-

bidding foreign-owned agricultural enterprises from receiving Pa. Industrial Development project (PIDA) funding. PIDA loan funding is given to industrial development agencies for the payment of a part of the cost of industrial development projects in critical economic areas in the Commonwealth.

Rep. Foster and the Grange feel that State monies should not be allocated to foreign-owned agricultural enterprises, especially since they add to the current product surpluses, and aren't critical employment entities.

To use an example, foreign-owned farm operations are in competition with poultry farmers — and this is one of the industries

that has been suffering greatly from not only foreign investors moving in, but also from the drought, a depressed egg market, and most recently, the severe avian influenza outbreak, according to Wismer.

"The Grange is hoping that Senator Wenger's idea also will bring some needed relief specifically to the burdened poultry farmer affected by this disease," Wismer said.

The Senator is introducing an appropriations amendment for about \$1 million in state grant money to reimburse farmers for bird losses prior to the release of federal depopulation funds in November. The money would also provide grants for clean-up expenses so that "poultry farmers

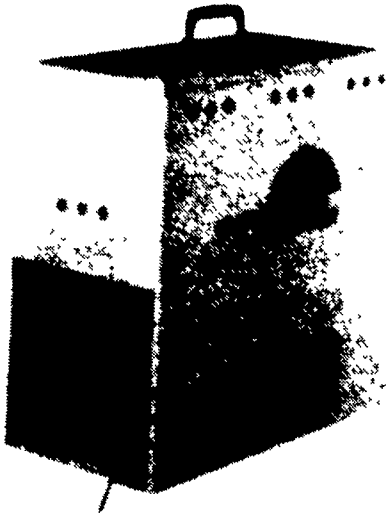
can get back in business as soon as possible," Wenger said.

"This is just another step in a total program - there may be a need for a loan program to follow the clean-up in order to resume business," he said.

The Grange has been requesting government funding for retroactive payments for bird losses prior to the federal depopulation program, clean-up monies, and down-time income loss reimbursements. Poultry farms affected are inoperable during clean-up/disinfection for anywhere from 30 days to three months.

"There is no money coming in from the bird houses, but there are still mortgage payments to make, and expenses to pay," Wismer said. "Senator Wenger's legislation is a major step towards getting the poultry farmer back on his feet."

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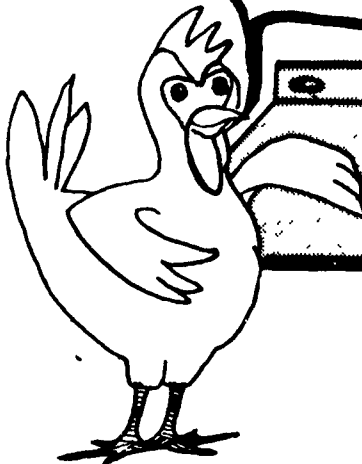
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