

Public hearing for Conestoga Ag Preserve scheduled

LANCASTER — On Wednesday evening, February 20, a public hearing will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Conestoga Fire Hall. The hearing is sponsored by the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and is intended to hear public comments about the establishment of an Agricultural Preserve in northern Conestoga Township.

Preserving the most productive of our agricultural land resources is one of the most important issues in Lancaster County's future. Lancaster County's production tops all non-irrigated counties in the nation. Indeed, our local production exceeds that of 15

different states in the nation. The scenic, productive and cultural qualities of our farming landscape are unique and unsurpassed. Lancaster County is a very desirable place, so we continue to grow in population and to chip away at our most valuable resource at a rate of several thousand acres every year.

In 1975 Lancaster County adopted Directions: A Comprehensive Plan for Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in which more than 100,000 acres are planned for future growth and development and 278,000 acres of the best farmland outside of planned growth areas are planned

for continued agricultural use.

Conestoga Township took a step towards preserving farmland in 1980 by adopting protective agricultural zoning which does not permit extensive non-agricultural development. To date 24 of the 41 townships in Lancaster County have adopted similar "effective" agricultural zoning.

Toward strengthening the resolve and commitment to farmland preservation, the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board has identified and proposed an AGRICULTURAL PRESERVE in the northern part of the Conestoga Township.

The area is more than 1,900 acres

of very productive farmland where soils are predominately Class I, II and III under USDA productive capability classifications and where land is both planned and effectively zoned for agriculture.

The effects of establishment of the proposed Conestoga AGRICULTURAL PRESERVE by Lancaster County will be:

- A new policy area in which normal agricultural activities are given added protection and insulation from nuisance complaints and suits.

- A new policy which will discourage and steer away or prohibit new unplanned highways, public facilities and public land acquisition from occurring in the Preserve

- Priority and eligibility for qualified farm owners in the Preserve to voluntarily participate in Lancaster County's preservation deed restriction program including deed restriction donation or sale, right of first refusal agreements and possible last resort purchase-preservation and resale of farms faced with conversion to other uses.

The Agricultural Preserve is intended to be a means toward saving farmland from conflicting development, to result in a more

permanent agricultural resource and to target preservation benefits to those areas most important to the future of agriculture, and to exclude those areas necessary and planned for future growth.

Landowners will have a new set of options including voluntary deed restriction donation with significant tax benefits or the possibility of compensation through an incentive deed restriction sale on a voluntary basis.

The Preserve will be a targeted priority area for farmland preservation in Lancaster County.

Landowners and interested citizens are invited on the evening of February 20th, to receive more detailed information and to offer comments and pose questions about the proposed Conestoga Agricultural Preserve.

The Township has endorsed the concept and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board looks forward to a great deal of interest and participation in the public hearing.

Prior to or following the public hearing, the Agricultural Preserve Board can be contacted at 50 North Duke Street, P.O. Box 3480, Lancaster, PA 17603, or by phone at 299-8355.

State Senate Ag Committee backs two farm measures

HARRISBURG — The Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee unanimously voted to report two pieces of legislation affecting the agricultural community of Pennsylvania during a meeting held here today, reports Sen. Edward W. Helfrick, chairman.

In their first official action of the new legislative session, the Committee favorably released a resolution which will "memorialize the governor to proclaim March 20, 1985 as Pennsylvania Agriculture Day," says Helfrick, who sponsored the legislation. "This proclamation coincides with the national celebration of Agriculture Day. We hope farmers and non-farmers alike are made more aware of the importance of our state's number one industry through observances of this kind."

Another Helfrick-sponsored bill, Senate Bill 310, also moves one step further to becoming law. This legislation creates an Agricultural Product Development Commission which is designed to channel public and private funds into efforts to expand the state's existing agribusiness, explains Helfrick.

"It is more important than ever to keep Pennsylvania-grown and processed foods out in front of the competition," declares Helfrick. "My bill also is designed to help promote our state's image as an agricultural keystone, supporting the nation's farm industry, along with being a top manufacturing state."

Senate Bill 310 provides for an initial \$100,000 appropriation to be used in establishing the Commission. The members of the Commission include ten appointments made by the governor. These ten will be selected from a list of persons suggested by statewide farm organizations, commodity groups and food processors, plus non-agricultural groups. Also serving on the Commission will be the Secretary of Agriculture and the minority and majority chairmen of the House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees. Members will serve for non-consecutive three-year terms.

"The Commission will be authorized to expend monies to conduct research and promotional activities," says Helfrick. "These funds can be from federal, state or private resources with which the Commission establishes a contractual agreement for conducting this work."

"I expect to see both of these pieces of legislation move quickly through the Senate, and I have received indications from fellow legislators in the House of Representatives that swift passage is likely on that side of the General Assembly," comments Helfrick.

Cosponsoring Senate Bill 310 are: Sen. Noah Wenger, vice chairman of the Senate

Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee; Sen. Patrick Stapleton, minority chairman; and fellow senators Mark Singel, John Shumaker, James Ross, James Rhoades, John Peterson, Roy Wilt, Jeannette Reibman, David Brightbill, Craig Lewis, Doyle

Corman, and Roger Madigan.

Senate Resolution 9, the Pennsylvania Agriculture Day legislation, is cosponsored by Sens. Noah Wenger, Patrick Stapleton, James Ross, Tim Shaffer, Michael O'Pake, James Rhoades, Roger Madigan and Roy Wilt.

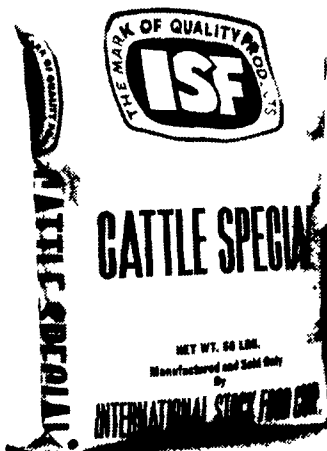
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