

# Pennsylvania's ag preservation proposal; a review

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STATE COLLEGE — Pennsylvania's farmers may soon have a new tool to preserve valuable farmland. A recently introduced amendment to the state's five-year old Agricultural Area Security Law would provide state funds for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements from farms threatened by development pressures.

Senate Bill 641 proposes a \$50 million state fund to buy the "development value" rights of farms to prevent the development of housing, shopping centers and industrial parks on farmland. Compensation for a farm's development potential would allow farmers to keep on farming without having to sell out to developers. Local economies would be strengthened because the basic agricultural industry would be retained while new development could be directed toward non-agricultural areas.

This approach to farmland preservation is being used in Maryland, New York and several New England states. As proposed in the Pennsylvania legislation, landowners who participate in the Agricultural Area Security Program would be eligible to sell agricultural conservation easements to a county agricultural conservation board.

The county board would set priorities for purchasing easements based on the development threat to farmland. Farms under immediate and intense development pressure would get high priority. Agricultural conservation easements would be

held for a minimum of 25 years, thus assuring the long-term continuation of farming in the area.

A state agricultural conservation board would administer and distribute the funds to participating counties. Half of the \$50 million fund would be allocated on the basis of a county's proportion of the total real estate transfer taxes collected statewide. The other half would be distributed according to the county's status as a producer of agricultural

products. For example, a heavy agricultural producing county would get \$8 of state funds for every \$1 of matching county funds. Lesser-producing counties would be eligible for \$4 of state funds for each county dollar.

It's too soon to tell how the proposal will fare in the state legislature, but several features are sure to be controversial. The \$50 million price tag will certainly be an issue, as well as the funding formula. Counties may resist the

local matching requirements, or at least push for uniform matching from the state without being tied to the value of agricultural production.

Some farmland will be removed from the development marketplace with the purchase of conservation easements, but that shouldn't create any significant scarcity in land available for homes and businesses. Pennsylvania's population is shifting, from the cities and boroughs to

townships, but there's plenty of land unsuitable for agriculture that can absorb these people.

One impact of the proposal to purchase agricultural conservation easements is sure to be an increase in the number of Agricultural Security Areas. There are fewer than 50 such areas at the present time, but the possibility of a strong financial inducement to preserve farmland should cause that number to skyrocket.

## USDA program would cut sulfa residues in swine

WASHINGTON — As part of a comprehensive regulatory program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is developing new tests that could better control sulfa residues in slaughtered hogs.

The agency announced its intentions with advance notice of proposed rulemaking. Details will be proposed following a 102-day public comment period, said Donald L. Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

According to Houston, pork with more than 0.1 parts per million sulfa is adulterated under the law and must be condemned. Violative levels of sulfa drugs can remain in hogs at slaughter if feed consumed in the previous days contained traces of the drug.

"According to our residue monitoring data, sulfa violation rates have increased to about 6 percent in recent years," Houston said. "While industry groups are responding to the increase, a new regulatory program — including sulfa testing of hogs at slaughter by USDA inspectors — also may be needed."

Houston said the industry and the government worked together in 1978-1979 and succeeded in controlling sulfa residues. That campaign produced a dramatic decline in violations — from a high of more than 9 percent of slaughtered hogs in 1977 to approximately 4 percent in 1980, he said.

"We are confident that success can be repeated, especially in light of technological advances made since that time," said Houston.

"USDA is field testing new quick tests that farmers could use to check feed and live hogs for sulfa

And, USDA inspectors could perform the tests as part of a regulatory program at the slaughterhouse.

"Because testing could delay slaughter operations and have a significant impact on the pork industry, plans are being announced before actual rule changes are proposed," he said.

According to Houston, specifics of the program will reflect public comments. The program is expected to include:

- routine in-plant testing of hogs for sulfas;
- retention at the slaughterhouse of entire hog shipments for

laboratory analysis if routine testing reveals sulfa residues;

- condemnation of pork proven by laboratory analysis to have violative sulfa levels;

- control of the disposition of condemned carcasses; and

- intensified testing of hogs from sources that previously marketed animals with violative sulfa residue levels.

Comments on USDA's Federal Register notice are due Aug. 30, and may be sent to the FSIS Hearing Clerk, Room 2637-South, FSIS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## Seminar on pig management

LANCASTER — A seminar on Managing Pigs for Profit will be conducted by a midwestern swine veterinary consultant at the Farm & Home Center, on June 18.

Dr. Al Leman, professor of swine medicine and director of the Swine Center at the University of Minnesota, will discuss reducing pig losses, boosting profits and utilizing records. The program will begin at 3 p.m. and run until 9 p.m.


The seminar is one of a series sponsored by International Pigletter, of which Leman is one of the contributing authors. The seminars are designed for specialized hog farmers and swine veterinarians. Leman conducts a series of such seminars each winter in the Corn Belt. This is the first time he has brought the program to the East.

Leman is known world-wide as a frequent speaker both at scientific meetings and pork producer sessions. He is the editor of the reference book "Diseases of


Swine," succeeding the late Howard H. Dunne of Pennsylvania State University.

He consults for large hog operations around the world and will bring to the seminar a scientific approach combined with practical observations on swine farms around the world, according to Neal Black, Editor of Pigletter, the international newsletter on swine health and management.

For additional information or reservations, contact Black at Box 662, South St. Paul, MN 55075 or call 612-457-0142.



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