

PFA pushes budget, trade, tax stands in D.C. 'tour'

WASHINGTON — The president of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association (PFA) has urged Congress to protect the economic future of agriculture when considering the major issues of tax reform, international trade and deficit reduction.

PFA president Keith Eckel of Clarks Summit, Lackawanna County made the point during a breakfast address to farmers and congressmen attending PFA's national legislative tour. Over 200 PFA members traveled to Washington, D.C. March 5-6 to meet with their congressmen on important farm issues.

PFA is a voluntary, general farm organization representing over 23,000 farm families. It is affiliated with the nation's largest farm organization, the 3.3-million member American Farm Bureau Federation.

Addressing the issue of tax reform, Eckel said, "PFA and the American Farm Bureau Federation support the need for tax reform. However, we oppose measures that would impose a greater tax burden on production agriculture than it already is carrying."

Saying that tax reform legislation could greatly improve the efficiency and growth of our nation's economy, Eckel noted that, "At the present time we have seen excessive investment in agriculture at a disadvantage to fulltime farmers."

On the issue of international trade, Eckel said PFA and American Farm Bureau oppose protectionist legislation, either by the U.S. or foreign countries. "I would urge you as Congressmen to tell our trade representatives to be tough. Argue fiercely for fair treatment of U.S. agricultural products by foreign countries," Eckel told the congressmen.

"The United States can be competitive if it is farmer competing with farmer. But, the

American farmer is at a great disadvantage . . . in a losing situation . . . when he must compete with the treasury of a foreign government," Eckel said.

Addressing the budget cuts resulting from the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction laws, Eckel said, "At first glimpse it looks like agriculture is going to pay a much higher price than

others to meet the goals of Gramm-Rudman . . . The goals are commendable, but some of the players on this budget cutting team get to play first string without even trying out for the team, mainly the major domestic entitlement programs." Eckel pointed out that Social Security, veterans' compensation and

pensions and other entitlement programs will not be cut by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law.

PFA is urging Congress to amend the deficit reduction law to repeal the exemption from budget cuts for entitlement programs. PFA also supports a three-year freeze in the cost-of-living adjustments for entitlement programs. "Farmers have long

supported a reduction in federal spending . . . but it must be a fair share of across-the-board cuts," Eckel said.

When Congress considers budget cuts in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Eckel told lawmakers, "We would encourage you to make spending cuts which will have the least impact on production agriculture."

USDA pressured on spring loans

WASHINGTON — Rep. Ed Jones, D-Tenn., Chairman of a House Agriculture subcommittee which oversees farm credit programs, has called on the Agriculture Department to move swiftly to allocate Farmers Home Administration loan funds to meet current spring planting needs.

"It is my understanding that second quarter (January-March) allocations for direct farm operating funds are exhausted or near depletion in more than 10 states already...the need for action in this matter is obvious and critical," Jones warned in a letter to Acting Secretary of Agriculture Frank Naylor, Jr.

"Therefore I urge that sufficient amounts of the funds previously set aside for the third and fourth quarters be immediately released and made available in states where needed to continue processing applications for direct farm operating loans," Jones added.

The Farmers Home Administration, an Agriculture Department agency, functions as a lender of last resort for farmers who cannot qualify for credit from other sources. The agency makes short and intermediate direct loans for farm operating needs and longer term real estate loans. It also provides guarantees for operating and real estate loans made by private lenders. The

allocations Jones requested are in the direct lending program for farm operating needs.

"Any shutdown in these loans, even a temporary one because a state has exhausted its quarterly allocation, could be very damaging to farmers who are trying to make spring planting plans in one of the toughest economic years any of us have seen for many producers. I hope the administration will respond to my request — and quickly," Jones added in a separate statement.

The subcommittee Chairman's letter continued, "With the entire month of March yet to go before the (next quarterly) allocations are made, it is inevitable that many more states will join the list of those unable to process applications for direct operating loans at exactly the time when farmers' planting season credit needs are approaching the peak."

Jones pointed out also that in

passing the 1985 farm bill, Congress gave the Agriculture Department authority to transfer up to 25 percent of funds authorized for guaranteed loans into the direct loan account. That authority should be used promptly to help avoid any cases in which farmers find they cannot get FmHA direct credit at the time it is needed for spring bills.

"Based on recent FmHA loan activity reports which indicate only about 13 percent of the...guaranteed farm operating loan fund has been obligated so far, it seems unlikely that a 25 percent transfer to the direct loan category would result in any disruption or shortfall in the guaranteed loan program," Jones told Naylor.

Cumberland Valley Co-op holds annual meeting

SHIPPENSBURG — The Cumberland Valley Cooperative advisory committee recently held its annual winter meeting at University Lodge in Shippensburg.

Henry A. Zajac, general manager of Cumberland Valley Cooperative, reviewed the co-op's financial statement and covered

operational highlights. He also discussed changes in agriculture occurring today.

The following new employees were introduced: Robert King, plant manager, Shippensburg; Gerald Potter, plant manager, Mechanicsburg; and Jan Kloesmyer, dairy specialist.

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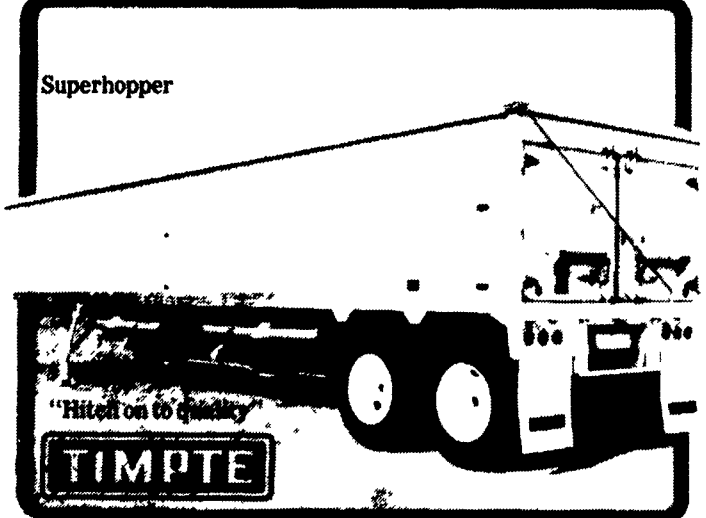
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