

FARM FORUM OUR READERS WRITE

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Editor:

The loss of farmland in Pennsylvania is reaching a critical level. Each year, thousands of acres of prime agricultural land are lost in our state as farms are converted to other uses.

Some people do not realize the impact of this situation. Less acreage available for agricultural production would be a detriment to a state whose number one industry is agriculture and agri-business. In fact, one out of every five workers in this state is employed by the agricultural industry — an enormous contribution to our economic vitality.

On November 3, the voters of the Commonwealth will be asked to decide whether the state should issue a \$100 million bond to support a program targeted at conserving prime agricultural areas. If the bond referendum is approved by the voters, the \$100 million in funds would be allocated to counties to use toward the purchase of development rights on prime farmland.

Farmers in designated farming areas who wish to participate in the program would be offered the monetary difference between the market price of the land if sold for farming and the price if it were sold for development. In return, the farmer would hand over only the development rights to the land for 25 years or perpetuity. The farm owner would retain all legal ownership to the land and would be free to sell the land at any time. However, the new owner would be bound by the development restriction held by the county. It should be emphasized that this would be a voluntary program and that no land owner would be forced to participate.

The need for this program is clear if we are to protect and preserve the scenic and productive qualities of Pennsylvania's rural landscape. For nearly 20 years, the state has been genuinely interested in saving farmland. In 1969, Governor Raymond Shafer appointed a committee to come up with recommendations for conservation of agricultural areas and every governor and General Assembly since the completion of that study has worked on developing a farmland conservation program. In 1981, the General Assembly passed the Agricultural Area Security Act (Act 43) which provided for a farmland conservation program, but funding to implement the program was not included. This referendum is intended to provide that funding.

As a major supporter of ag-land preservation, I encourage all Pennsylvanians, not just farmers and rural residents, to support the referendum on the November ballot. I am hopeful that the citizens of this Commonwealth will realize that only by protecting our rich and fertile lands can we hope to preserve the beauty and bounty of Pennsylvania agriculture.

Noah Wenger
PA State Senator

Editor:

On November 3, Pennsylvania voters will be asked to approve a program to finance the purchase of development rights of farmland. Agricultural conservation easements would be purchased for 25 years or in perpetuity on large tracts of mainly Class I and II prime farmland.

I urge everyone to vote for this

program because urbanization is rapidly and permanently destroying prime farmland (a proportionally small area of land) when building homes and businesses elsewhere is economically feasible. Since 1960, Pennsylvania has lost almost half its farms and the current annual loss is 90,000 acres of all types of farmland. Also, urbanization destroys four square miles of prime farmland and eight square miles of other types of land in the United States every day. Agricultural zoning on marginal and prime farmland hasn't been adequate at controlling the loss.

Voting for this program will help to keep food prices down. Currently, two-thirds of Pennsylvania's food is from out of state. When farmland disappears, increased trucking raises food prices and food quality suffers. Prime farmland costs the least to farm, produces food at the lowest cost and this reflects in lower food prices for consumers.

Another benefit of this program is the preservation of Pennsylvania's number one industry — agriculture/agribusiness which employs 20 percent of Pennsylvania's workforce. Also, farmers will feel more secure, and they would improve their land and buildings for themselves and future farmers.

Other benefits are the preservation of wildlife habitat, open space and the visual appeal of picturesque farmland.

Twelve other states, including New York, New Jersey and Maryland, have farmland preservation programs. Pennsylvania's program would cost less than \$10 per resident and would include all the benefits listed here and more. Please vote for farmland preservation at the November 3 election.

Reuben Weaver III
Ephrata

Editor:

To date I have read many articles concerning the "farmland referendum." Everyone from Extension Service officials, to conservation district officials, to voters leagues, to farm organizations, to associations of boroughs, commissioners, township supervisors, chamber of business and industry and so on are supporting the referendum.

I have read many times how important we are as farmers that my head is starting to swell! But I wonder why I have to keep working harder and longer! Everyone says we must save our farmland (and I agree), so we don't have to ship food because of the cost it would involve and, of course, so we have fresh food. All of the above mentioned groups don't want the consumer to have to pay higher prices for food, but the farmer shall work harder and sell cheaper. Did you read what's going to happen to milk in the next three years? "I feel important."

I think the farmer ought to receive higher prices for his products so he can be competitive with businesses and developers or whoever thinks he needs to buy our farms. We're important according to all these informative articles, but let's not give the farmer more money for his products. It will cost too much at the supermarket.

Richard Barczewski of University of Delaware says times have been bad for the farmer and things don't look good for the next several years. No, we don't need a \$100 million bond, but we need prices for our goods so we can be competitive!

We just came through with RCMA. I thought the farmers were trying to help themselves and keep the government out, somewhat at least. Now we are hit with this on our ballot. Sounds like a case of "the government has regulated my farm business so badly that I am not sure just who does own it. I have been suspected, inspected, examined and re-examined, informed, reformed and misinformed."

"But I still pay the taxes!"

What happens to the farms taken by immanent domain? I have been reading too much of it lately. It must be stopped! Seems like these two things are fighting against each other.

When Representative Samuel Morris introduced the farmland preservation bill he also introduced HB 440. This is the one I have been wanting to see take priority and be publicized and put on the ballot. This would change the total tax structure. My representative tells me this is one of hundreds that have been introduced in the last 10 or 15 years. He says HB 440 probably will not come up for a vote, but the subject of the bill probably will be considered seriously either this year or

next. I hope all you groups mentioned in the first paragraph and others get in the act and write many articles concerning this like you do the farmland referendum.

I read several times one in every five jobs in Pennsylvania is ag related. I think there are too many ag-related jobs already and the farmer pays for this in everything he buys, but the farmer shall sell cheap. Won't this referendum, if it passes, create more ag-related jobs. Guess I'll have to work harder and longer to help pay the eight-hour guy.

Yes, there are many good reasons for preserving farmland, but keep government out and let us be competitive with every other business or developer.

As the saying goes, "If someone wants something bad enough (a new car, TV, boat), he will get the money for it."

If someone wants food bad enough they will get the money for it also.

An old man (dead many years) once said, "Half the people in this world are here to devil the other half." He should be living now!

Hilda M. Blatt

Jonestown

P.S. I think I will run out and enroll in a real estate class!

Editor:

A vote "YES" on Nov. 3 for approval of a referendum to raise funds to support "Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation" will be a move in the right direction.

Lancaster County, especially, needs to maintain a good balance of farming and industry to continue the present healthy economy.

Many a farmer, and his family, needs to be encouraged and helped in numerous ways to continue farming and preserve the farm for future generations. The AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM provides help to that end. Eastern Pennsylvania is famous for its high producing fertile soil, neat farm buildings and scenic beauty. The area as a whole cannot afford to lose these assets.

Let us back up Senator Noah Wenger who sponsored the bill and most of our elected officials favoring approval of the referendum such as: Gov. Casey, Lt. Gov. Singel, Sec. of Agri. Wolfe, Lancaster County Commissioners and many numerous organizations as well. Our VOTE also is needed. Let us give "PENNSYLVANIA AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION" a good send off on Nov. 3 with a "YES" VOTE.

Harold C. Herr
Kirkwood



The Lancaster County Poultry Association's annual banquet mixed pleasure with business on Thursday night. New board members were elected. Milton Landis, right, and Jay Irwin, left, welcome new board members Roger Garber and J. Doug Wolgemuth.



Good Grief! What is Charlie Brown and his gang doing in the pumpkin patch? Whatever the reason, Whitney Rossi of Litz found it great fun to join them in the patch at Stauffers of Kissel Hill, Litz. The store sold almost 90 tons of pumpkins grown by Lancaster County farmers.