

Farmers To Benefit From Tax Reform

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ferent interests are walking around looking for tax reform to disguise a means to raise additional revenues. I will let it up to the next legislature rather than allow that to happen," Stauffer said.

Gohl said in some situations it may make sense to keep the property tax base. "In the Pocono area where you have many summer or vacation homes and people come in to live for three or four days per week, an income tax would not add much to the revenues because these people have their official residence out of the state. Part-time property owners use the services that create a heavy cost to the community.

"But in other parts of the state where you have a large citizen population it makes sense to use the income tax. That way the persons with larger incomes will pay for the community services. And the equity that has been put into a property many years earlier will not be taxed as vigorously," Gohl said.

Both Gohl and Stauffer agree that even the income tax method should not be pushed too hard.

Boyd Wolff, state ag secretary, said the task force set up by Gover-

nor Robert Casey in August of 1987 made recommendations that said any tax reform should be fair, be voluntary to the local community, produce adequate and stable revenue and provide no windfalls to governments at taxpayers' expense.

Under the income tax proposal, the present state tax base would be used. Thus, social security, retirement benefits, and unemployment and workmen's compensation would not be taxed. Where a senior citizen qualifies for the property tax rebate provision, no income tax would be collected.

The sales tax would be structured so that the county government could receive sales tax revenues to reduce property taxes and at the same time share revenues, according to formula, a portion with municipal governments in their counties.

Controls are built into the proposals so that local governments may not collect large amounts of additional taxes because of the change in the tax system. Before any local government can implement any provision of the new tax law, it must form a citizens' committee to look at the tax base, find

what revenues are now generated and determine what makes sense for the future of their community. In addition, a ceiling is placed on each county so that the cap may not be exceeded.

"Agriculture will be very fortunate if we can get this tax reform bill," Wolff said. "The bill mainly provides for real property tax relief by reducing real estate taxes up to 30 percent on the entire farm if the farm is the primary residence of the farmer," Wolff said. "The provision will shift the burden of taxes from a real property base to a non-real property base. Tax revenues will come from income taxes and sales taxes."

Even reassessment of property values will be more palatable if less emphasis is placed on property taxes. "When 76 percent of revenues come from property taxes and you reduce this burden down to 50 percent, I think you will find that when people's properties are reassessed, their reaction will not be as violent as they are now," Gohl said.

In addition, farmers who don't improve their properties now because their tax base will increase, will have less reason to

feel this way under the new tax reform proposals.

Present state legislators have only a few days to make the necessary compromises, get the bill out of committee and enact it into law. Since this session of the legislature may not by law, act after November 30, they don't have much time left.

To create interest and show public support for tax reform, Governor Casey has set November 15 as a legislative rally day in Harrisburg. All interested persons are invited to come to the State Capitol and talk to their senators and representatives. The Governor is

scheduled to speak to the citizens at 2 p.m.

In addition to tax reform, Wolff would like farmers who attend the legislative rally to encourage their legislators to also pass the Farm Land Preservation Bill, the Penn Ag Farm Bill and the Animal Health Commission Bill. "We are concerned that if we lose the momentum generated in this session of the legislature, we will not be able to generate enthusiasm again," Wolff said. That's why the Casey administration has scheduled the rally--to call attention to the need to get these bills enacted by the end of November.

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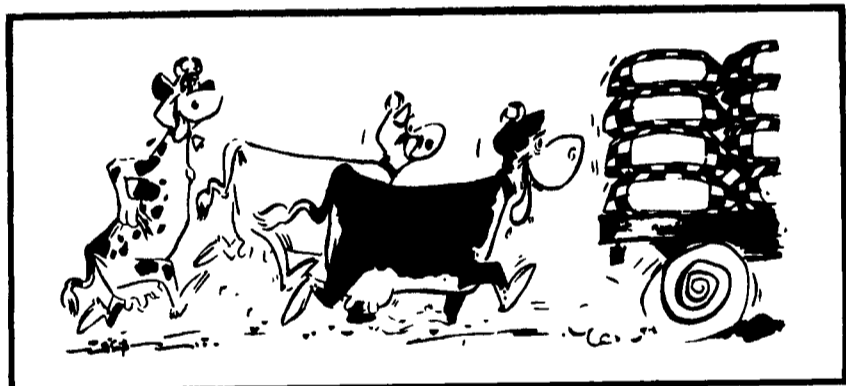
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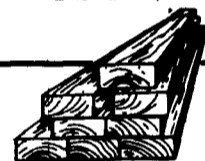
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