

Farmers Must Think About Farm Bill

NEWARK, DE — The federal farm bill, which comes up for renewal or revision every five years, has implications for all Americans, not just those in the agricultural sector.

Environmental conservation and food stamps are examples of issues addressed by the 1990 Farm Bill that have an impact on many citizens.

Gerald Vaughn, University of Delaware extension specialist in resource economics and policy, said that while most people would be relatively satisfied with an extension of the 1985 bill, some changes may be beneficial.

The Bush administration has proposed new amendments. Since Congress will probably not act on the bill until late summer, Vaughn says now is the time for the public to make its sentiments about the proposals known to legislators.

"Delawareans should pay particular attention to three proposals: the Standing Disaster Program, the Farmers Home Administration proposals, and the Conservation Reserve Program," Vaughn said.

"The proposed Standing Disaster Program is part of a safety net for Delaware farmers that provides for government assistance in the event of natural disasters," said Vaughn. "Under the new proposals, federal crop insurance and emergency disaster legislation would be dropped and replaced by the Standing Disaster Program.

However, the Standing Disaster Program would cover only the approximately 50 crops that were previously covered by federal crop insurance. Emergency disaster legislation has covered almost 600 crops in the past."

Vaughn noted that, under the Standing Disaster Program, no farmer in a county would benefit unless the effects of a disaster were felt countywide.

"Private insurers may be able to offer affordable supplementary crop insurance that will include crops not covered by the Standing Disaster Program," the economist said. "In addition, private insurance could also cover the losses of individual farmers in counties where disaster effects are not widespread."

Vaughn advised farmers to investigate the expense and coverage of private insurance before they lend support to the proposed federal Standing Disaster Program.

Proposals for the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) also have an impact on a safety net matter — farm credit. Critics charge that FmHA programs have been abused and have lost the support of borrowers and taxpayers. But as the lender of last resort, FmHA provides credit to farmers who have difficulty getting affordable credit from commercial banks, production credit associations, and other lenders.

"The proposals would tighten

FmHA's lending practices," Vaughn said. "A proposed major goal would be to provide assistance to credit-worthy farmers for a temporary period rather than allowing farmers to become dependent on FmHA assistance."

"Delaware farmers must be sure that the proposed changes do not make FmHA assistance so limited and restricted that the agency loses its helpfulness," he said. "Young farmers in particular often need help to get started because of the high capital investment required in farming, and the proposed restrictions could hinder this."

The third issue of importance to Delawareans is the Conservation Reserve Program. The bill proposes to redirect the Conservation Reserve Program to include payments to farmers for purposes of improving water quality and protecting wetlands.

For example, farmers could be paid to retire cropland within 1,000 feet of a well in a state-approved wellhead protection area. They could also be paid for existing cropped wetlands and restorable cropland wetlands.

"Delaware cropland is highly

vulnerable to groundwater contamination," Vaughn said. "Much of the state's cropland was formerly wet. Cultivating this type of land depends on an extensive drainage network established over the past half century and before."

"Delaware farmers should carefully study the Conservation Reserve Program's potential benefits and costs if redirected to water quality and wetlands protection," Vaughn said. "Water quality and wetlands protection are valid needs which agriculture must help address. Whether the proposed redirection of the Conservation Reserve Program is a good mechanism to help meet these needs in Delaware is the

question farmers should consider."

Food stamp legislation is always included as part of the Farm Bill. Vaughn noted that the 1990 proposals underline an effort to aid homeless people in obtaining quality food.

"Many, perhaps most, homeless people qualify for food stamps, but few participate," he said. "Food stamps traditionally cannot be used to buy food to eat on site. But under what I term compassionate proposals, homeless people could use their food stamps to purchase prepared meals at authorized shelters, soup kitchens, and restaurants offering reduced prices."

Berks Co. Cattlemen's Association Meeting

READING (Berks Co.) — The Berks County Cattlemen's Association will be holding its quarterly information meeting today.

The meeting will be held at the Penn State Berks Campus, beginning at 6 p.m. at the Janssen Conference Center.

Following a brief directors meeting, the agenda will include an update from Penn State faculty on the planned agricultural curri-

culum which will be offered at the local Penn State branch.

Durwood Helms, regional supervisor for the federal Packers and Stockyards Administration based in Lancaster, will discuss USDA's laws and regulations affecting beef marketing.

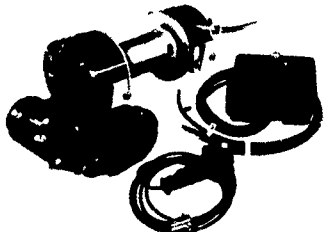
For more information, contact Sheila Miller, president of the BCCA, (215) 589-5617.

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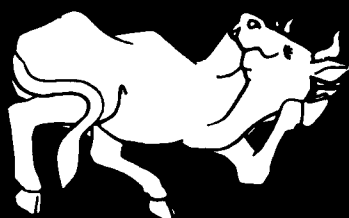
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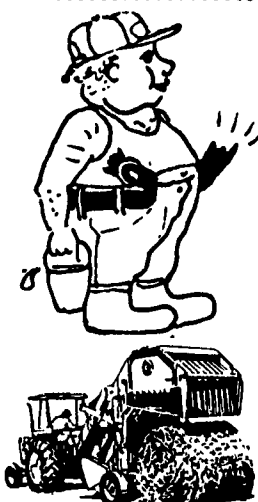
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