

Farm Forum

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teen years I am obviously very interested in this issue. I can understand the interest this issue has stirred in an election year among segments of the agricultural community and state officials.

My primary reason for writing is to perhaps shed some light on a little different perspective on this issue. As a teacher of agriculture at Garden Spot High School for the past thirteen years, I have seen a lot of changes in agricultural education. Some of these changes have been positive in my opinion such as the broadening of the instruction to include far more than the traditional agricultural production and agricultural mechanics programs. However, many of the changes have negative consequences on our high school agricultural education programs throughout the state.

From my perspective the elimination of the \$33,000 line item from Governor Casey's budget is

insignificant when compared to the far greater problem of inadequate staffing at the state and regional levels of PDE.

Since I entered the profession in 1977 there have been significant changes in the availability of assistance from PDE in the areas of curriculum development, and developing a quality FFA program with supervised agricultural experiences being an integral part of the total agricultural education program. I had the advantage of having Mr. Henry Givler serve as the regional vocational consultant upon my entry into teaching. He was able to provide me with the kind of sound advice that only a person with experience in agricultural education could provide. At that time there were two full-time specialists in agricultural education in the state office and seven regional specialists — with agricultural background and expertise to assist us.

In contrast today we have basically a half-time person in the state office and a person with absolutely no FFA or agricultural education experience serving us as FFA coordinator in the vocational student organization office. Additionally there are three individuals designated in the regional offices to consult with agricultural education instructors and provide on sight assistance. Two of the regional staff members have some experience in agricultural education. However; in the western region, where the need appears to be the greatest for assistance, there is no one to assist the high school agriculture education instructor in a meaningful way. Even the individuals who have the expertise to be of assistance to the agriculture education instructor in the field are virtually unable to do so because their positions have evolved into that of generalist, expected to include all seven areas of vocational education.

Since 1980, forty-one agriculture education programs have been eliminated in the state, twenty-one of them were programs in the western region where

there is a vacancy in the regional field office.

When I began in teaching I was able to get assistance from Henry Givler. He was able to answer specific questions about curriculum emphasis, FFA program development and other problems facing a new teacher. If I were to begin teaching agricultural education today, I would upon contacting the regional office for assistance find that I would be met with the prospect of having an individual who has no agricultural education or FFA background whatsoever attempt to advise me. I would find that I could expect little more than a cordial attempt to be supportive in a very general kind of way (in the absence of anything more substantive) and possibly to have some of my questions on funding answered by reading excerpts of the PDE policy manual to me.

This letter is not meant as an indictment of the Casey administration or our current agricultural education program specialist in the eastern regional field office. It is meant to shed some light on how far backwards we have

moved in the past ten years in terms of support of agricultural education in this state. It seems to me that it wouldn't take a genius to figure out that since agriculture is the number one industry in the state that it would be both economically and politically prudent for leaders in both parties to make agricultural education a number one priority.

It will take far more commitment than a \$33,000 line item to get the job done. We need a far reaching and comprehensive plan to upgrade curriculum to meet the ever changing technological needs of agriculture education in our state and the staffing and funding to make it a reality. I sincerely hope that legislators on both sides of the aisle, our State Secretary of Agriculture, State Secretary of Education and Governor will utilize their leadership skills collectively to clearly identify this problem and have the courage to do something about it. The economic well-being of our state and the future of many of our finest young people may hang in the balance.

Robert B. Lauffer
Environmental
Agriscience Instructor
Garden Spot High School
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Editor:

The American Oat Association would like us (taxpayers, the government) to subsidize the oat processing industry (*Lancaster Farming*, April 28 issue).

I submit that if oat processors need a reliable supply of oats, they should contract with growers for their needs. Surely there are people willing to grow oats if the price warrants.

Further, I would like to know who is "forcing" these processors to "build in foreign countries." Isn't it their own unwillingness to pay a livable price for oats that has caused this decline in production? Aren't they publicly waving the flag for American agriculture and going elsewhere because it's cheaper?

Lastly, I would like to say, I don't believe another excuse they like to use: "The consumer won't pay." Sure, there are limits, but I don't think they can't afford to pay more for oats. Stop by the markets sometime and check out the prices on these new products made with oat bran.

R. Poole
Oxford

Editor:

Several weeks ago you printed my original letter to Governor Casey concerning the staffing for agriculture education through the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the elimination of funding for our FFA Foundation from the state budget. As subsequent letters have pointed out, both items are of major concern to agriculture teachers, FFA members, and supporters of agriculture education in Pennsylvania.

As the number one industry in Pennsylvania, we feel agriculture and specifically agricultural education deserves the BIPARTISAN support of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Agriculture, Governor Casey, and the legislature.

The problems we face in agricultural education have not started with the Casey administration, but neither have they improved. If agricultural education in Pennsylvania is to provide relevant, dynamic, and progressive education for a constantly changing agriculture, all groups must work together.

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