

Answer Farm Questions

(Continued from Page A1)

Gov. Casey: Our economic development policy over the past four years has involved ag in a very direct way. We have two agricultural representatives on our economic development partnership. And two of the major initiatives on the economic partnership have been related to agriculture and the rural area. One is food processing that directly affects the agricultural community. It's one of the pillars of our economy; the other is hardwoods production.

In addition, we have put over \$50 million in the development of Pennsylvania agriculture through PEDA, the capital loan fund; BEDFA Benjamin Franklin Partnership; The Agricultural Entrepreneurial Development Fund; new to our administration, The PennAg Fund; The Farm Market Loan Fund; and the Family Farm Loan Development Fund.

Having said that, I don't know if you can assign a numerical ranking to one vs. another. All these industries in Pennsylvania are interdependent economically. But I just want to say, Agriculture has been a key to everything we have done here by way of job creation, economic activity, and market research. One of the first things I did when I came in this door, in my first budget, was to add \$5 million to the ag extension service at Penn State to make sure all the research information and other activities gets to the farmer. I don't know if that was ever done before in that kind of massive amount of money.

Atty. Gen. Hafer: Agriculture is our number one industry, generating \$38 billion a year in Pennsylvania. It helps keep hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvania men and women in jobs from Philadelphia to Erie, tens of thousands of jobs in the cities and more in the rural areas. Agriculture has a ripple effect on the economy from banks to the retail level. Agriculture deserves the full attention and the support of our next governor.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Question: Pennsylvania's program of farmland preservation through conservation easements was created under the Casey Administration. Some critics claim the program got off to a slow start. Are you satisfied with the farmland preservation program so far?

Gov. Casey: We are very proud of the farmland preservation program. We have received a national award and have \$100 million committed to it, as you know. It's now being looked at as a model for other states. In a letter from the director of the American Farmland Trust, he points out that far from being slow on getting underway, as some people have contended, Pennsylvania's program (quoting) is functioning far sooner than any of the several earlier state programs. So we are off to a good start.

Atty. Gen. Hafer: The program is still moving too slowly. Casey moved slowly in implementing it, and failed to meet deadlines for regulations. A very important vacancy was left for months. While now moving, its time to take further action to get counties involved, and work with them to adopt the necessary programs to take full advantage of the available funding.

PROFITABLE FARMING

Question: One of the points often made related to farmland preservation is that if we make farming profitable, we will automatically preserve the farmer and his farm. Can you give any suggestions how the person in the governor's office can help make farming more profitable?

Gov. Casey: Obviously, profit comes from reduced costs and increased revenues, or a combination of both. In looking at the cost side, we have not raised taxes, which helps

everyone, including the farm community. We have increased money for ag research. The 5 million for the extension service has certainly helped on the cost side of the ledger. We have encouraged integrated pest management to reduce the cost of pesticides, and we have encouraged the use of less expensive newsprint for bedding, which is widely used, as you know. And we have provided financial assistance for the adoption of new technology.

On the other side of the ledger, to increase demand and price, we have opened new markets, worldwide, with our aggressive ag exports program. And ag exports are up 61 percent since 1986, which I think is something that should be mentioned. Second, we have given the power of promotion back to the producers through Act 1, called Act 1 because it was the first act I signed after I got here. It was a delivery of a campaign promise to take it away from the bureaucrats and give it back to the farmer. And that's been done.

Next, we have increased state spending on ag promotion by about 51 percent. We have tripled the number of economic financing programs available to Pennsylvania farmers through the Department of Agriculture and the economic partnership. In all these ways we have done our best to reduce costs and increase markets and price for products, thereby contributing somewhat to the farmer's profit.

Atty. Gen. Hafer: The governor can help make farming more profitable by standing shoulder to shoulder with farmers to help the market their products, and by not letting DER stand on farmers' shoulders. The governor can help by relieving the unfair tax burdens on farmers created by Casey's spending programs. In addition, the funding necessary for agricultural research and new product development should be provided. By taking a more aggressive role in promoting and marketing Pennsylvania farm products, the state can provide funds for this effort. By making agriculture a major part of the overall effort to improve the Pennsylvania economy we can rebuild the economic development in agriculture.

WETLANDS

Question: The importance of preserving wetlands is widely recognized. But the impact of the various interpretations of what constitutes wetlands often unfairly burdens landowners and abuses private property rights. What are your views on the wetland issue and how do you support farmers who may lose tillable land to save wetlands?

Gov. Casey: This a relatively new issue in terms of the regulatory laws of the Commonwealth. As you know, DER has proposed strong wetlands regulation. I know the concern that's out there in the farming community about loss of tillable land. The problem with compensation, as we see it, is that it would be prohibitively expensive and would hamstring DER efforts to protect the wetlands. At the same time, the regulations are being revised according to public comment, and it is my understanding that many of the concerns of the ag community are being addressed as part of that process. Hopefully, out of that process will come some response that will be helpful to the ag community. I want to assure the farm community that all these comments are being considered by us, and the final regulations will not restrict normal farming operations.

Atty. Gen. Hafer: Wetlands are important natural resources just as are farmlands. I support efforts to preserve those important exceptional value wetlands, but I also feel limited value wetlands can be treated less rigidly. A permit waiver should be given for normal farming activities, including aquaculture and silviculture, with land use management practices and county conservation plans are being followed. If a farmer's rights to land are taken through the wetland delineation process, that farmer should have recourse to tax credits as compensation for the taking.

(Turn to Page A21)



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