

Senate Reconfirms Sec. Boyd Wolff

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During the past four years as state agriculture secretary, the 59-year-old Wolff (he will be 60 on May 17), has overseen an agency that has incorporated a number of new programs and the continued refurbishing of the state Farm Show complex.

However, like many agencies in state government, the Department of Agriculture has suffered a number of financial support cuts which have resulted in the loss of rank and file workers to carry out some of the programs. Some of the workers were recently furloughed. Other positions, vacated through retirement or other means, remain unfilled.

In an attempt to maintain the agency's ability to continue service, several programs have been combined, such as the Bureau of Weights and Measures with the Bureau of Amusement Rides and Attractions.

In addition to reductions in state support to the department, the agricultural industry continues to have its ups and downs.

Diseases, record low milk prices to dairymen following a year of record high milk prices, uncertain, but promising world markets, the possibility of free markets with Mexico and Canada, increased changes of rural to urban populations, bank failures, . . . all combine to create one of the most complex atmospheres for those attempting to make a living through agriculture.

In a telephone interview Thursday, Wolff said his outlook for Pennsylvania's agricultural industry remained optimistic. He said he had a positive outlook for the functionality of the PDA, despite hard cutbacks in state tax dollars to the department.

"We're lean. We did some furloughs in February, but we're currently hiring some people who will be filling some crucial positions. And when the budget gets settled I hope we will be able to hire some more people.

"We took some setbacks but every agency had to do that. It's been a difficult year," Wolff said.

"When I talk to my counterparts — at DER, or welfare, or anywhere — it's just been a rough year," he said. "With the governor's (new) budget and a tax increase, it's a starting point," he said.

According to Wolff, "This is the third time this century (there's been a budget problem due to the economy), in 1930, 1977 and this year.

"When the budget was passed last July, we made the best estimate. It will probably be half a billion (dollars) less than anticipated.

"And because of the national economy going bad, there's more welfare, increased cost of Medicare, the cost of special education has gone up. If you take the half a billion (underestimated) and add half a billion in increased costs from last July, that put us where we are.

"We all took cuts. I don't feel agriculture took any more of a cut than any other agency."

Over the past four years, Wolff said a number of important goals have been achieved.

"The first four years, we got the farmland preservation going, we got the animal health commission appointed to better animal diagnostics to the farmers, and we've expanded the promotion and marketing efforts through the six groups.

"In the coming four years we want to get as many farms as possible in the farmland preservation. We have 36 farms now. We hope to continue with that program."

The farmland preservation program is on the brink of taking off, according to Wolff. In order to be considered for the program, a landowner must first place his land into an agricultural security area.

"In the Ag Security Areas, there are over 1.27 million acres. That's an attempt to save farmland too," he said. Prior to the establishment of the farmland preservation program — which had Sen. Noah Wenger, R-Lancaster, as its a prime sponsor — less than 500,000 acres were designated as an agricultural security area.

Wolff said he is also looking forward to furthering the other programs that have been initiated.

"I hope we can get our diagnostic program in operation, and we will continue to market Pennsylvania products."

The renovation of the 60-acre state Farm Show complex also lists high on achievements begun during the past four years.

"The roof is on, the new lighting system is 99 percent in, the heating system will be complete this summer," Wolff said.

"We're going to break ground for new building maybe this month, probably in May, but at least in June."

Gov. Casey has come under fire from both Republican and Democratic legislators for the budget deficit and for proposals from his Office of the Budget which attacked several agricultural programs.

With Casey no longer eligible to run for another term in office, and Wolff confirmed, some have suggested that perhaps Wolff might block political influences from affecting the agriculture department.

However, Wolff said there is nothing to block.

"I try to keep the department as non-partisan as we can. There's not a better system than democracy and sometimes we get critical of it.

"The Republican Caucus, they like to question the governor's support for agriculture. I just point to what we've been able to do over the last four years. Economically, \$72 million went to agriculture and forestry.

"They (legislators and opposition to Casey) helped too, because they passed legislation, but if it wouldn't have been for his (Casey's) support, those things wouldn't have happened," Wolff said.

For the future, Wolff said he hopes to see agriculture prosper and agribusiness grow.

"I intend to continue the marketing promotions and the economic development programs.

"There's an aquaculture summit May 21 and May 22 and we're developing a new-farmer program where we're going to help in Bedford County (as a pilot program for backing up low-interest bank loans to beginning farmers).

"We're going to try to help farmers farm without adversely affecting the environment. With all the (environmental) issues, we just have to be conscious about how we farm."

Furthermore, Wolff said that efforts need to be concentrated on education of the non-farming public.

"Another goal would be consumer outreach, so that the non-farm folks appreciate agriculture.

They get the cheapest and most wholesome food supply.

"And we should try to work with consumers so that they see how we treat our animals and ask their understanding of why we need chemicals to farm for a safe food supply.

"On the environmental issues we're developing a plan to help farmers dispose of (waste) chemicals and chemical containers. It's a pilot program."

On the horizon are several calls from groups looking for the department of agriculture to take on additional responsibilities, such as certifying people for nutrient management, which is being developed in

the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and has received a great deal of support from agricultural organizations.

Wolff said there is room for expanded responsibility within the department, but not without adequate funding.

"We can do the certification," Wolff said. "That would not be a big program.

"It's easy for the Legislature to give a new program. We don't object. But when they give us a new program we need the dollars to operate the new program."

Wolff said the cutback of services from the agriculture department are understood by the far-

mers the department serves.

For example, the department used to have several toll-free telephone numbers available to the public. They were eliminated in order to save about \$30,000.

According to Wolff, when it came out that severe cutbacks were going to be necessary, "We looked at the whole department. That 800 number — and it became a number used for information and we were doing an awful lot of calls that were information type — farmers are conservative by nature and it's been a bad year, and they don't mind paying for a phone call. They'd rather see us be conservative than raise taxes."

Berks Co. Dairy Princess Holds No Illusions About Milk

CONNIE LEINBACH

Berks Co. Correspondent
LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — The healthful benefits of milk are no illusion, Berks County's new Dairy Princess, Kelly Gelsinger, proclaims.

Gelsinger, 17, of Womelsdorf R.D. 1, was crowned with the title Saturday night during the coronation pageant in the Berks County Agriculture Center. She was the only contestant to seek the crown from last year's winner, Suzann Moyer.

Having lived on her grandfather's dairy farm all her life, Kelly appreciates country life. "I'm looking forward to promoting milk and milk products," she said.

Given her performing talents and outgoing personality displayed during the pageant, she should have no problem. Kelly charmed the audience with a magic show, depicting the benefits of drinking milk — strong bodies, vitamins and minerals. Eschewing such milk product fakes as whipped dessert topping and creamer for coffee, Kelly said, as she performed a trick: "Don't be fooled. Always look for the 'Real' seal.

Kelly is a junior at Conrad Weiser High School. She is active in FFA, soccer, and the girls' chorus. Her activities with the children's ministry at her church, Myerstown Grace Brethren, involve puppets and clowning.

The field of contestants for the Li'l Miss Dairy Princess was much larger. Rachel Emily Hartman, a spunky 5-year-old from Hamburg, captured that honor over five others.

"It's like a dream come true," Rachel said after the pageant. She is the daughter of Bruce and Pollyanna Hartman, who milk 56 Holsteins on their 160-acre farm near Hamburg. Rachel said she likes white over chocolate milk and helps to sweep the barn.

When asked by toastmaster Tammy Balthaser if she ever drinks milk, Rachel said, "Sometimes I get to drink milk."

Six-year-old Joel Bubbenmoyer serenaded the new princesses with "Thank Heaven for Little Girls," after the two had received their crowns. Joel of Fleetwood also sang and told jokes while the judges were making their decision about the Li'l Miss.

"Where do cows take their dates on Valentine's Day?" he asked. "To the m-o-o-o-vies!"

The sparkling youngster appears every Sunday at noon on Al Alberts Showcase, channel 6. He also has appeared at the Valley Forge Music Fair and has entertained in some of the casinos in Atlantic City. In her farewell speech, Suzann said having been

Dairy Princess helped her grow in all areas of her life and that she is not as shy as she was before she won the honor.

"It's easier to get up in front of a group and speak," Suzann noted. Her schedule, averaging 12 promotions a month, included farm tours, and speaking at schools, granges and fairs. A high-school senior, Suzann plans to continue living and working on her parents' 1,000-acre farm in New Tripoli, Lehigh County. She also plans to continue breeding and selling miniature horses, which she has done for more than a year. Suzann honored several Berks County pupils for winning her coloring contest in which elementary students colored a picture of a cow. The winners were Ryan Dish, nursery, Little People Day School, Exeter Township; Mark Nester, kindergarten, Richmond Elemen-

tary; Jolene Longenecker, first grade, Strausstown Elementary; Kelly Gernert, second grade, Greenwich Elementary; Heather Avedissian, third grade, Lincoln Park Elementary; Sara Marks, fourth grade; and Kelly Mast, fifth grade, both of Twin Valley Elementary.

Suzann also thanked Jill Neiman, the 1990 Li'l Miss Dairy Princess, for her companionship while attending fairs and other functions throughout the year. The pageant is sponsored by the Berks County Milk Production Committee. It was coordinated by Mary Haag, who said the committee is looking for another coordinator to organize the bookings and promotions for the princess. Anyone interested in this volunteer job is asked to call Haag at (215) 926-4211.



Newly crowned Berks County Dairy Princess Kelly Gelsinger and Li'l Miss Jill Neiman are eager to promote milk.



Joel Bubbenmoyer, 6, serenades the new Berks County princesses, Kelly Gelsinger and Jill Neiman, with "Thank Heaven for Little Girls."