

(Continued from Page A1)

"It looks real good. It is, as far as agriculture and rural programs are concerned, the best budget that I've seen in a long time and it's the best (agriculture and rural) budget that anyone has seen in a long time," Crawford said.

However, Crawford, who is a spokesman for Rep. Kenneth Cole, chairman of the House agriculture committee, said, "I'm not at all pleased with the governor's veto (of \$1 million for the animal health commission). We took three steps forward and one step back, but still that's two steps forward."

Sheila Miller, executive director of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee said she also is pleased with the majority of funding provided for agriculture,

but was critical of the veto and the decrease in the PDA's operating budget.

According to Miller, the commission — which was formed in 1988 by combining numerous animal disease research and diagnostic programs and service, and animal indemnities — had its recommended funding of \$5.4 million originally decided by a bipartisan group.

(The animal indemnities program has been removed from the purview of the commission which did not have authority to pay for condemned animals. It is a separate line item with full funding.)

While budget negotiations were ongoing in the four caucuses (Republican and Democrat leadership core groups which meet in

secret in each of the two legislative bodies to work out problems and positions), the recommended level of funding was reduced to \$3.924 million.

By presstime, it could not be determined how, who recommended, or when the cut from \$5.4 million was made, but it was apparently done in an effort to eliminate \$100 million in spending to comply with negotiation agreements.

The governor then used his line-item veto authority to eliminate another \$1 million.

Miller works for Sen. Edward Helfrick, chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. He also lambasted Casey for taking away the \$1 million.

"(It) was a gesture of bad faith

that reflects his true attitude toward agriculture in Pennsylvania," Helfrick said in a statement.

"While the governor claims to support agriculture and programs benefitting rural areas, his arbitrary decision to cut an appropriation that the General Assembly had already decided was necessary for the commission, once again demonstrates his level of commitment to rural Pennsylvanians," he said.

Crawford said however, that even with the reduced budget, the commission may be able to do its job. It needs to, he said, to prove it is an effective agency.

"For the last two years, the commission has been studying the diagnostic systems in Pennsylvania and other states. We are at the

point now for the train to leave the station," he said.

"It will be a bell weather year for the commission. It will be an indicator of how effective the commission can be," he said. But two things have to happen, Crawford said. "The commission has to exercise its statutory authority and the burden is on the (Casey) administration to let it do the job it was created to do."

The PDA operating budget actually lost \$151,000. But Casey had sought to reduce it by at least another \$100,000.

Miller said that both budget reductions — for the commission and PDA — are not justified.

"The argument (by PDA Secretary Boyd Wolff) that the governor is only being fair — that the Department of Agriculture is only taking its lumps, like the others — is pretty weak," Miller said.

"You can't compare the department's (PDA) budget to other departments. And the only bright spot in the Department of Ag's budget was the Animal Health Commission line. And the governor touted this as a master mind program of his. And then to suddenly pull the rug out from under the commission seems to be a lack of commitment on the part of the governor," she said.

And while those outside of the state Department of Agriculture have been critical of Casey for those cuts and for the cuts to the department's operation budget, Gene Schenck, agriculture press secretary, said there is no criticism coming from within.

As far as the ag department's total budget — federal and state funded — that has been raised by \$1.67 million, mostly for program costs, not for operations.

However, Schenck acknowledged that the reduced operating budget would make getting the job done more difficult.

"We're just going to have to work even harder to keep them (the department's programs) going. We're going to continue to march.

"We've been operating with tight operational budgets for years, without cutting programs. We don't intend to stop. (The administration has) been demanding increased efficiency," he said.

"What we're saying to our people is, don't spend the money doing what you do. We're telling people to keep on with the program, just don't spend a lot of money."

Schenck, and others in the department received their first delayed paycheck Thursday. They also will get no pay increase.

"From a taxpayer point of view, and farmers are taxpayers, people should be happy. These things (cuts) have had to happen and we have to keep the programs going on," he said.

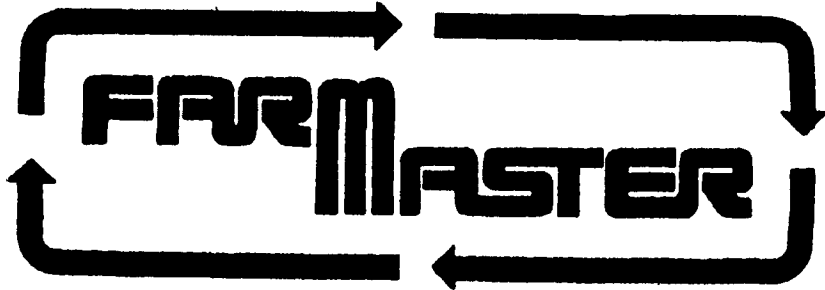
Schenck did not defend Casey's slashing of the budget for the Animal Health Commission, but he said it was one of the highlights that the commission got an increase over last year.

"There are a couple of things in this budget worth mentioning. Among those are the money for the health commission," he said.

Whether or not the funding will be adequate for the commission to properly carry out its duties is not a question for Schenck. "We think so. It's \$1.2 million more than they had before."

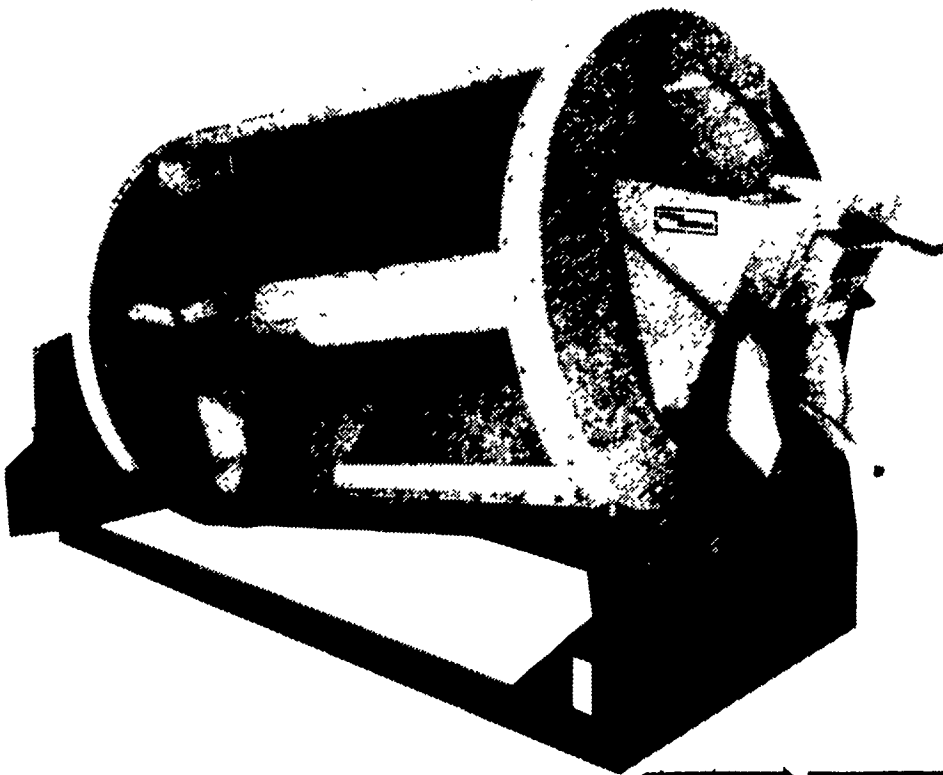
The budget package, which can still be modified throughout the next year, currently contains numerous line items which were returned to full levels of spending

(Turn to Page A48)



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