

1991 Filled With Changes, Extremes, Successes

(Continued from Page A1)

continue to suffer and with no good solutions apparent.

The state budget was not resolved until more than a month after deadline. The agricultural programs and agencies were given budgets under which they could function, but then had the bulk of those promised monies taken back in an Indian-giver move by the Casey administration.

Gov. Casey called it fiscal reserves.

During the year, Gov. Casey also got the largest tax increase put through — he still has issued warnings that it might not be enough.

On the other hand, the tobacco growers of Pennsylvania, most of whom reside in Lancaster County, had been working on forming a representative organization for years. Casey's tobacco tax proposal proved to be a catalyst for getting the organization solidified and a large contingent met with state legislators for the first time.

Animal rights and anti-gun factions grew in notoriety forcing defendants of agriculture and the second amendment to take action and discuss those and other problems of working among a largely urban society.

Land prices dropped, and so did interest rates.

However, because federal bank regulators have been reclassifying a large number of bank loans as "unsecured," banks are no longer making many loans.

Teachers all across the state hit the picket line, delaying school starts and initiating legislation which would reduce their ability to walk off the job en masse, but would also force local school boards to address the issue of teacher pay from less of a politically motivated stance.

Many school districts also lost out when promised state funding was budgeted, then rescinded.

Amid some controversy, Penn State got rid of its colored breed dairy cattle.

More agricultural and rural people became unemployed. "Early retirement" became a common substitute phrase for laying-off those with seniority, more job benefits and larger paychecks in order to save companies overhead costs.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union dissolved into a Commonwealth of Independent States, after a failed military coup and other historic events.

A number of new independent nations formed on the European continent holding the promise of increased trade.

But at the same time, international talks fell through during attempts to form an equitable General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

To many people, more change happened in the world this past year than in any one year in their lives.

From the perspective of the Department of Agriculture, there were a number of accomplishments during the year.

• Under Pennsylvania's farmland program, the purchase of building easements on more than 11,000 acres of prime farmland was approved, and the number of counties with farmland preservation boards grew to 31.

• A pilot program to collect outdated farm chemicals was announced, in which farmers in six counties can turn in pesticides that are no longer needed, obsolete,

have broken down, or have been banned. Program details are yet to be worked out.

• Construction of a Farm Show Complex addition was begun and is to be completed in 1993. The project, a \$8.8 million Livestock Exhibition Hall, was first authorized in 1957, and after 34 years of delays, the ground was broken for a 84,000 square foot, two-story building.

• The Agricultural Technology Loan Program was initiated. The program provides matching loans of up to \$50,000 to help farmers employ new technology during production. At an interest rate that is half the federal discount rate, farmers can borrow funds for projects that will increase productivity or provide entry into new product areas.

• The Farmers Market Nutrition Program was expanded to serve 24,000 women in 44 counties. The program, which started in 1988, allows pregnant and breastfeeding WIC participants to purchase fresh Pennsylvania fruits and vegetables through farmers' markets.

• The value of Pennsylvania agricultural exports has risen by more than \$22 million since 1986. The most recent numbers show exports totaled \$295.1 million for 1990, and it is expected that that has continued to grow through increased participation in overseas trade shows. The department has helped foreign buyers discover Pennsylvania products such as candy, snacks, grocery items, beverages, lumber, logs, wood products and food handling equipment.

• By the fall of 1991, 107 Pennsylvania companies had signed up to use the new Pennsylvania logo, "Quality . . . From Our Home To Yours." The copywrote logo was created by the PennFood Program to raise consumer awareness and demand for food products produced or processed by state businesses.

• The department of agriculture hired 15 additional food inspectors and conducted 10,000 new inspections. More than 34,000 inspections were conducted in 1991, compared to 23,933 in 1987.

• Three major agricultural shows got a financial break from the Farm Show Commission which exempted them from paying rental fees for use of the Farm Show Complex: Keystone International Livestock Exposition; Pennsylvania All-American Dairy Show; and the Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Show. In addition, improvements to the Junior Livestock Show and Sale helped set new records for the amounts paid to young exhibitors who sell their animals on the last day of the Farm Show. Other items, such as the food court helped the success of the annual exposition.

Legislatively, significant milestones were reached in several areas, not only new programs, laws and money, according to the executive directors of the Legislature's two agricultural and rural affairs committees.

Shelia Miller, executive director of the Senate Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee, said a piece of legislation, House Bill 872, which would create a dedicated fund for the operation of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB) is sitting on the governor's desk. He had until yesterday to sign it. His intentions were not known by presstime.

Miller, who is a staff member for Sen. Edward Helfrick, said that Lancaster County's Sen. Noah Wenger and the Senate leadership (including Helfrick who is majority chair of the committee) helped get the bill through in an attempt to get the PMMB fully funded. The PMMB is one of the casualties of the budgetary reserve program Gov. Casey implemented. They don't have the funds available to continue for long.

"We are seeing progress on several of the Ag 2000 bills," Miller said.

Ag 2000 was a package of several pieces of agricultural legislation with the overall focus of getting the state's number one business back into a strong growth mode.

As part of the package, Miller said, "We anticipate (Sen. Ed) Madigan's organic food labeling bill to pass in January and we're also to get our crop insurance bill moving. However, in that it does require an appropriation, in light of the fiscal restraints, it may be difficult to get that one through.

"The same thing holds true with the rest of our bills — the sustainable ag, the manure digester — they do carry some fiscal note attached to them, but we feel it should go through because of its value."

On other fronts, Miller said that a seasonal farm labor bill is being looked at and attempts are being made to work out some differences in opinion.

There are some other bills also which were initiated this year and are awaiting consideration in the House.

(Miller also made note that a public hearing on the issue of nutrient management, not the bill, is tentatively being scheduled for Feb. 12.)

Steve Crawford, executive director of the House Ag and Rural Affairs Committee, gave his reflections on 1991.

"I think one of the highlights was being able to pass a law that created the rural leadership development act, which helps 4H and FFA members across the state.

"Also, the nutrient management legislation, with our ability to get that passed in the House in a fashion that is supported by both the environmental and agricultural sides is a highlight. That's like flying a jet through the eye of the needle. We have to see what happens in the Senate," Crawford said.

"The overall theme, from our standpoint, was the emergence of the Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee and the other rural members of the General Assembly on the Democratic side as a power within the caucus, which is significant in a lot of ways, but mostly in the way it came to bear on agriculture in the budget.

"When you look at a year which was difficult with the taxes, you could argue that it may have been the best agriculture budget ever. The budget coming out of the House being fashioned largely by the House took care of every major concern agriculture had and was left pretty much intact," Crawford said.

"On the downside, I'm disappointed in the governor's decision to place a number of those budget initiatives in budgetary reserve.

"I recognize the fact that you've got to tighten your belt in tight times and that's certainly where agriculture is at. The problem I have is not so much that it was done, but the manner in which it was done.

"I doubt that the Department of Agriculture had any input into what was put into reserve and these decisions are being made by very few people and their decisions are based on a faulty premise. They're not heading in the right direction. To cut \$40,000 for FFA, that's ridiculous," Crawford said.

"(Amounts of money) like that don't show. I hope (the governor's office) didn't ask anybody, because I hope nobody would have recommended those cuts take place."

But Crawford said the best thing for 1991 was the "firm establishment of the ag people in our caucus as a force to be reckoned with. And you are going to see that in every budget from now on. All the budgetary reserves in the world won't take that away."

Crawford said that the future of Pennsylvania lies within the strength of the agriculture industry, not the other way around, but that the industry and Legislature must be progressive in order to lead.

"We try to be progressive and I think we have been, and very active.

"Nutrient management is an example of a progressive piece of legislation designed to preempt a mass proliferation of local ordinances designed to get rid of certain operations.

"We have to do that in agricul-

(Turn to Page A29)

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