

Groundwater To Be Issue Of '90s

LEWISBURG (Union Co.) — H₂O. Water. That word and those letters were probably the first ones we all learned in chemistry class.

Water is vital to our health and to the economic well-being of every community in the Susquehanna Valley. It is probably more vital than food, because we can survive on little or no food for several days, but without water, survival time is measured in hours.

Rural areas of Pennsylvania such as the Susquehanna Valley rely heavily on groundwater. Recent studies indicate that the quality and quantity of water supplies in rural areas may be in jeopardy because of a wide array of human activities taking place on our land in both urban and rural areas.

Despite rather frequent reports of groundwater contamination, few people are presently concerned about protecting our groundwater. Probably because of this lack of concern, few local government officials appear to be concerned about taking actions that would protect our valuable groundwater resource.

Because of these studies, about two years ago several Penn State Cooperative Extension staff and members of the League of Women Voters met to discuss the groundwater issue in Pennsylvania. Was it a concern of the general public? Should it be of concern? What information was available to answer those questions? Studies indicated, and there was a general consensus among the group, that there was evidence that our groundwater was in jeopardy.

Subsequent information gathering meetings convinced the group to initiate the Pennsylvania Groundwater Policy Education Project. A joint application by Penn State Cooperative Extension and The League Of Women Voters of Pennsylvania to The W. K. Kellogg Foundation was viewed favorably and funding become available for the Pennsylvania Groundwater Policy Education project.

"We hope to raise awareness of the need for sound public policy to protect our groundwater resources," said Dr. Charles Abdalla, project co-director and associate professor of agricultural economics in Penn State's College of Agriculture. Abdalla said the goal is to encourage citizen participation in

groundwater policy and land-use decisions and foster cooperation among various public and private groups.

"Protecting groundwater quality and quantity depends on many seemingly small decisions made by local governments and individuals," said project co-director Edith Stevens, a water specialist with the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. "We hope this project will enhance public understanding of how activities on the land affect the water beneath the surface."

The first phase of the project was a series of six regional training conferences designed to help municipal officials, League members, Cooperative Extension staff, and interested citizens to better understand the groundwater situation in Pennsylvania. During October/November, several hundred attended the conferences and learned about groundwater characteristics, sources of contamination, and local management tools available to protect groundwater.

Participants learned that local officials have the authority to develop land use regulations that can have an effect on how much or how little we contaminate our groundwater. As part of the Pennsylvania Groundwater Public Policy Education, a survey was made to determine what municipal officials thought about the groundwater situation in Pennsylvania. Twenty five hundred and sixty-one municipal governments received the survey, and 53 percent responded.

The survey results indicated that in northeastern Pennsylvania, more than half (58.5 percent) of the officials indicated that groundwater is not an issue. Twenty percent said it was of concern, but only five percent said it was an issue and had taken government action.

Officials were asked where they

placed groundwater on their list of priority issues. A little more than 10 percent indicated it was of prime importance. Almost one-third said it was co-equal with other important issues. Another one-third said it was of secondary importance and one-fourth said it was of little importance.

Lack of money, community awareness, and technical assistance were the major barriers local

officials perceived to doing something about groundwater in their municipalities. When questioned about the types of assistance needed to begin work on the groundwater issues in their communities, more than half of all officials returning surveys indicated they needed funding, education, and data on local groundwater conditions.

The survey results indicated to conference participants that there

is a lot of work to be done by the Pennsylvania Groundwater Public Policy group and others in Pennsylvania.

If you would like to know more about groundwater in Pennsylvania, call or visit your local cooperative extension office or contact a member of the League of Women Voters and ask for a copy of the publication, "A Primer for Pennsylvanians."

Bread Price Rise Unjustified, Say Leaders

DENVER, Colo. — The nation's bakers and food retailers will be price-gouging American consumers if they raise the price of bread by five cents or more per loaf as recently predicted by the "Wall Street Journal," Farmers Union leaders and North Dakota Congressman Byron Dorgan said recently.

To demonstrate their point, the Farmers Union and Dorgan are sending laminated heels of bread and background material on the farmers' share of a loaf of bread to the editorial and business writers of the nation's major newspapers and television networks.

"Traditionally, the heel in a loaf of bread represents the farmers

share of the cost of that loaf no matter what the price of wheat is," said Dorgan, charging that the price of bread bears little relation to the price of wheat.

If there were a direct price relationship between wheat prices and bread prices, you ought to see bread prices fall when wheat prices decline, said North Dakota Farmers Union President Alan Bergman, a North Dakota wheat producer. "Unfortunately, that does not happen."

Bergman noted that in 1981, a one pound loaf of bread sold for 52 cents while wheat brought \$3.65 per bushel; in 1991, however, the same loaf of bread cost 73 cents and wheat sold for \$3.21 per bushel. In between, prices for

wheat fell as low as \$2.40 and bread prices did not decline.

"There is absolutely no justification for raising the price of a loaf of bread by a full nickel other than greed," said National Farmers Union President Leland Swenson.

Swenson explained that when wheat prices average about \$3.80 per bushel — the level which has prevailed in recent weeks — the farmers share of a loaf of bread averages about 5.7 cents and when wheat prices are at \$2.40 per bushel — last year's level — the farmers share is about 3.7 cents.

"Given that fact, how can the bakers and retailers justify raising the price of bread a nickel?" Swenson asked.

ROLLING ON...IN THE 90's

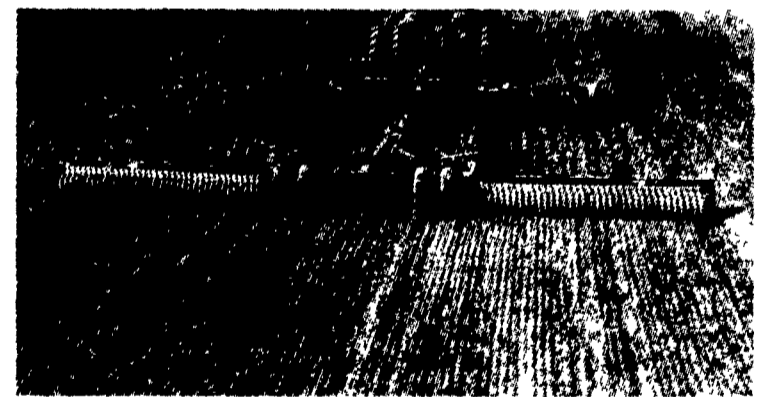
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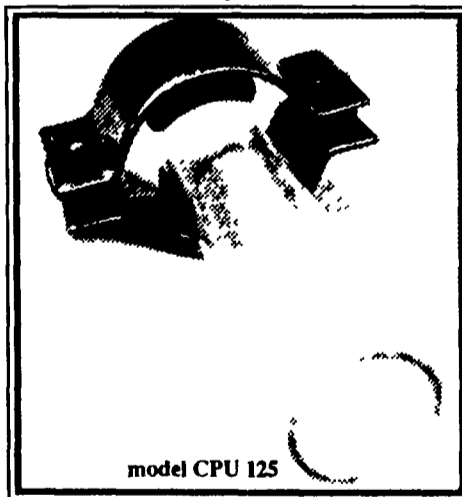
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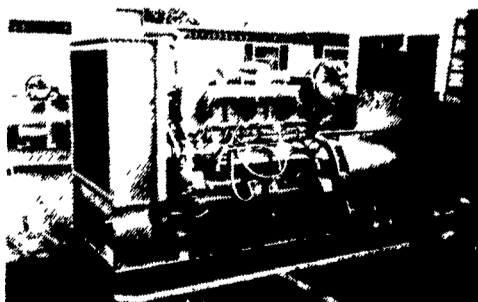
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