

Farmers Union Blasts Office Closings

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Robert C. Junk, Jr., President of the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, expressed his organization's frustration with what he called, "another last-minute political trick on farmers" by outgoing Agriculture Secretary Edward Madigan. Junk's comments were in response to Madigan's proposed closing of 18 Pennsylvania county offices of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS).

"I'm sure there could be more efficient ways of giving farmers access to the programs and services available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture," Junk said. "But, closing 18 offices is totally unjustified in Pennsylvania and, in our opinion, the Secretary is abusing his authority" he added.

"This not only would take farm programs geographically out of the reach of many farmers, it would remove them from the programs in other ways, too," Junk said, explaining that farmers have had input into farm programs at the local level through farmer-elected county committees since the 1930's.

Junk explained that the 1985 farm bill amended the law governing USDA structure, giving the Secretary limited discretionary authority to combine ASCS offices. "According to the law, the Secretary is allowed to combine counties into one office when he determines that 'there are insufficient farmers to establish a slate of candidates for a local committee

and hold an election,'" Junk said, citing 16 U.S.C. section 590h(b).

The farm group leader explained that, despite more than a decade of decreasing government support for agriculture and government inattention to concentration and vertical integration in the marketplace, there remain sufficient numbers of farmers throughout Pennsylvania to meet the test of establishing a slate of candidates for local ASCS committees. "Someone might be able to make a case for closing a handful of offices in the State," Junk said, "but closing 18 of them is just ridiculous."

Junk also pointed out that ASCS has just over 18,000 total employees, while another U.S. Department of Agriculture agency, the U.S. Forest Service, has a staff exceeding 50,000 people. "With 51% of USDA's budget going to food and nutrition programs, and 40% of USDA's staff working for the Forest Service, picking on ASCS seems extreme, to say the least," Junk said.

"In addition, he said, "thousands of the people who work for ASCS are located in Washington, D.C. Why is ASCS the only agency in USDA targeted for closures and why is the Secretary only after the county offices that deal directly with farmers?" Junk asked. "Why does every Under Secretary in USDA need two Deputy Undersecretaries? Why does the Assistant Secretary for Food and Consumer Services, need two Deputy Assistant Secretaries, an Execu-

tive Assistant, and a Private Secretary? Why does the General Counsel need a Deputy, four Associates and nine Assistants?" Junk demanded.

Junk said that Congress has been following the issue of reorganizing USDA very closely since the General Accounting Office (GAO) issued a report in late 1988 calling for an overhaul of USDA field offices. "That report compared the costs of running the county office with the amount of benefits paid out to farmers in the county and, at the time, even Secretary Yeautter said the comparison was misleading," Junk said, explaining that the ASCS workload includes nearly 50 different programs, only a few of which involve direct payments to farmers.

A second GAO report in late 1991 sparked renewed interest in the issue, and bills leading to USDA restructuring were pending in both the House and Senate by the end of the last Congress.

"Senator Wofford was an original co-sponsor of S. 2752 last Spring, and Farmers Union basically supported that legislation," Junk said. He explained that the bill would have set up a Reform Commission and given it 100 days to study USDA from top to bottom — every agency at every level — and report back to Congress and the Secretary on needed improvements. "We would have preferred to see field hearings to get farmers' input on how to make farm program administration

more efficient, but at least the Commission would have been fair and bi-partisan," Junk said.

"As important as this issue is for farmers and taxpayers, the new Congress and administration should have the opportunity to debate it and decide the direction USDA should take," Junk said.

"First it was his decision to scrap citrus marketing orders, and now this. With just over a week to go in office, Secretary Madigan has taken another last-minute, politically-motivated swipe at the farmers he has been paid to serve," Junk said. "If Secretary Madigan is really interested in the

best interests of taxpayers, he might want to start with his own \$143,800 annual salary. I think farmers and taxpayers deserve better than to have the Secretary of Agriculture trying to pull the rug out from under farm programs. Maybe Secretary Madigan could do us all a favor by going back to his family's cab company in Illinois right now and leave his last week's salary of \$2,765.38 in the federal treasury," he concluded.

The Pennsylvania Farmers Union serves family farmers producing a wide variety of commodities throughout Pennsylvania.

New Wool Survey Under Way

DENVER, Colo. — Beginning early next year, sheep producers will no longer have to guess at what's happening in the raw wool market thanks to new U.S. raw wool stock estimates being provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

In mid-January, NASS will survey about 800 wool warehouses, pools, mills, buyers and processors via mail questionnaires, personal enumeration, and follow-up telephone inquiries to develop official estimates of raw wool

stocks. The Department of Commerce dropped a similar data collection activity in 1988.

Estimates for the U.S. will deal with stocks of carpet and apparel wool and associated microns, and whether the wool is of foreign or domestic origin. Data on stocks of tops, noils, and mohair also will be gathered.

The wool stocks estimates will be published by NASS in the Wool and Mohair report in late March 1993 and by USDA's Economic Research Service in the Cotton and Wool release in May 1993.

Fruit Growers

Set Meeting

POTTSVILLE (Schuylkill Co.) — The Regional Schuylkill County Fruit Growers meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 10, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Pine View Acres, Chamberlain Avenue, Pottsville.

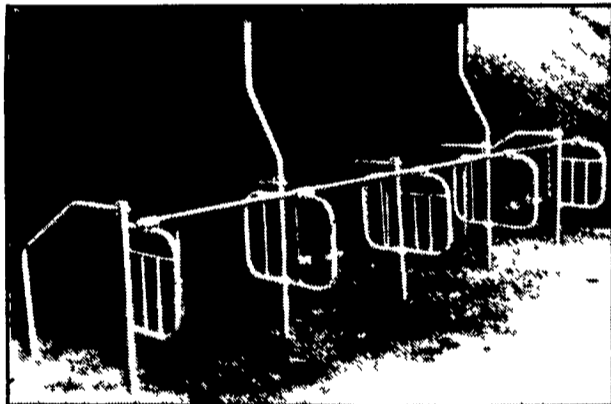
Speakers for the meeting will be Dr. Robert Crassweller, Penn State extension pomologist; Dr. Edwin Rajotte, Penn State extension entomologist; Dr. James Travis, Penn State extension pathologist; and Frederick W. Davis.

Topics discussed will include diagnosing nutritional disorders in the orchard, seasonal mite management, factors considered in making disease management decisions on apples, Chemsweep, update on pesticide rules and regulations, and are you prepared for the future?

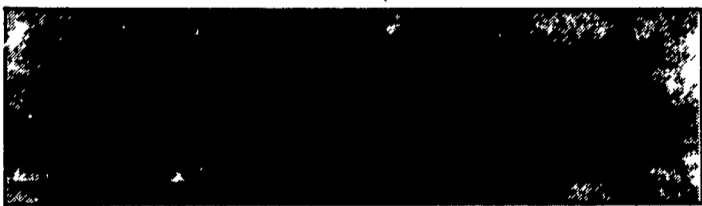
All fruit growers are invited to attend this meeting sponsored by the Schuylkill County Extension. Pesticide update credits will be issued at this meeting. Registration is required by February 2.

For additional information, contact George P. Perry Jr., county agent/horticulture, Schuylkill County Extension Office, P.O. Box 250, Schuylkill Haven, PA 17972-0250, (717) 385-3431.

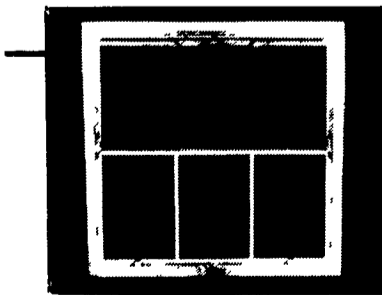
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