

Proposed Ephrata School Cuts May Have Drastic Impact On Ag Programs

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EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) —

Quality of agricultural programs for the Ephrata High School could be jeopardized if a proposed 1993-1994 school financial budget package, which cuts ag operating funds substantially, is passed by the Ephrata High School board, according to members of the board's ag advisory committee.

Members of the board have been assembling at various public meetings scheduled throughout the month to hear and discuss reactions by the public to the proposed budget. A final vote on the budget is set Monday at 7:30 p.m. in the school's Audion Room.

The proposal, which will affect about 90 students enrolled for next school year, was enacted as a result of a shortfall of necessary funds and takes the place of a previously proposed hike in mills, recently rejected by the board.

The proposed cuts in the budget to the agricultural program, in which final action won't be taken until after the meeting of the board Monday, includes halving the operating budget from \$23,910 to \$12,190. It also includes slashing the number of contract days (beyond the regular school days to oversee FFA student activity enterprises, weekend programs, fair involvement, and other events) from 28 days per ag teacher to 15 days. If passed, travel expenses will be docked from \$6,000 to \$2,750.

Proposed reduction

One of the major impacts on the quality of the ag programs will be the proposed reduction in contract days from 28 to 15, according to Ernest Orr, chairman of the ag department.

"You cannot have a quality program in 15 days," said Orr. "It's impossible. It's impossible to have quality with 28 or 30 days."

Orr said the contract days allow ag instructors time to visit incoming ninth graders and to travel dur-

ing the summer to inspect the students' supervised ag experience (SAE) projects, which are essential to FFA involvement.

Also, the proposed contract day and travel expense cutbacks will severely impact the ability of FFA'ers and students to travel to shows.

"It does not give us any time to go to the dairy shows, the hog shows, or things like that," said Orr.

Orr said the proposal would eliminate at least 75 percent of all field trips. Trips to projects sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the National FFA Center, judging activities (including the Pennsylvania Farm Show), FFA Leadership Conference, Eastern Regional Leadership Conference, and a "whole gamut of things," are in jeopardy and could be eliminated, according to Orr.

"We have to pick and choose which field trips to take," said Orr. "And field trips really are the backbone of ag."

Orr said that while the school is in a budget crunch, some cutbacks may be necessary. According to the ag instructor, the board (which is made up of few, if any, members that are directly involved in ag-related industries) is looking at the proposed budget, which may eliminate a great deal of other school programs, as a way to spread the cuts evenly.

Found problem

According to Ephrata school board president Gary G. Krafft, the board found a potential problem regarding funding last July which indicated a need for more funds to meet expenses (the state was not considering increasing the funds necessary to continue to operate). Also, the country's general economic slowdown has lessened revenues to the extent that the millage, as a result of new development, could not be increased.

The board decided it needed to "use assets more wisely" and to develop a new or changed methodology to reduce the cost of deliv-



The proposed cuts in the budget to the agricultural program, in which final action won't be taken until after the meeting of the board Monday, includes nearly halving the operating budget from \$23,910 to \$12,190. It also includes slashing the number of contract days (beyond the regular school days to oversee FFA student activity enterprises, weekend programs, fair involvement, and other events) from 28 days per ag teacher to 15 days. If passed, travel expenses will be docked from \$6,000 to \$2,750. Board members from left, John K. Griffith, Drew A. Myers, Gary G. Krafft, Dr. Theodore L. Soistmann, Jr., Shirley L. Lapi, Harry L. Shaub, Jr., Barbara L. Stauffer, Fred M. Thomas, and Stephen E. White. Photo by Andy Andrews

ering the same product (in this case, student learning), according to Krafft.

The board presented the proposal to the administration "to come forward with some type of program to achieve this goal," he told *Lancaster Farming*.

Public meeting

At a public meeting of the committee of the whole at the school Monday night, Kerry E. Boyd, chairman of the Ephrata Vo Ag Advisory Committee, outlined questions about the proposed budget. According to Boyd, the following questions need to be answered:

- If the budget is cut 45-55 percent, will teachers have the time and resources to allow the operation of a meaningful Vo Ag program?
- With a growth of 20 percent in enrollment in the program within two years, and a projected growth of 20 percent, how can the board expect Vo Ag teachers to continue the high standards of excellence this program has shown over the years, and how can they provide the time and resources necessary for students to excel and mentally grow?
- Boyd emphasized the lack of vital time needed for summer and weekend programs which allow students to grow in leadership and other life-long skills.

He made the following recommendations:

- The extra contract days for the two ag teachers not be cut further than 28 days they each receive. If possible, reinstate some of the 45 days per teacher they used to have.
- That the board reconsider the large cut in travel expenses, which support field trips and worthwhile leadership experiences that help students grow and develop within the Vo Ag program.

Boyd said that he understood the challenges facing the board and that some cuts may be necessary for the school to function.

Reconsider budget

At Monday night's meeting, the committee reviewed the proposed budget and answered questions from the public. About 60 attended the meeting, which included a large number of farmers and those involved in agribusiness in the county.

All voiced their support for continuation of the ag program and that the school board should reconsider the proposed budget and, if

cuts are necessary, treat all programs equally.

The board responded by saying that some administrative programs could not be cut, including all contract salaries.

Board president Krafft indicated that while cuts are important, what is more important is to rethink ways to improve the program, because budgeting is a 12-month-of-the-year job.

School board member Barbara L. Stauffer asked the board to reconsider the proposal regarding the ag program cuts, because they were "probably hitting this area a little too hard." She asked the board to do some readjusting of the proposal.

Situation unique

According to Barry Oswald, state ag advisor in the Pennsylvania Department of Education, what Ephrata High School is facing is unique, considering the large amount of ag industry common to the county.

If enacted, the cuts could have an affect on schools facing similar situations. Ag budgets could be affected in other schools, but the result of what happens at Ephrata may or may not have a direct impact on other schools in the state.

Most of the time, according to Oswald, it is the schools experiencing a steady decline in ag enrollment that suffer budget cutbacks to their ag programs.

Ephrata's situation is unique, according to Oswald, because the program is actually experiencing a growth in ag program involvement. The situation in Ephrata "is undoubtedly a lot different," he said, because of the steadily increasing enrollment of the students in ag-related courses.

Oswald said he was concerned that schools may begin to look hard at their proposed budgets and the situation "may open some eyes and it may prompt board members to look critically at what others might do," he said.

Regardless of what happens, according to Oswald, each school

operates as an independent, unique entity — its ways of handling budgetary problems are central to the school itself.

Why downsize?

At a curriculum meeting early this month, Sam Beamesderfer, of Gehman's Feed Mill in Denver, also spoke about the need for the board to reconsider the proposal. He said the ag program in a city such as Philadelphia has more applicants than the program will accept.

"Why does a city school offer agriculture courses and we are considering downsizing our program when we are in the 'garden spot' of the country?" said Beamesderfer.

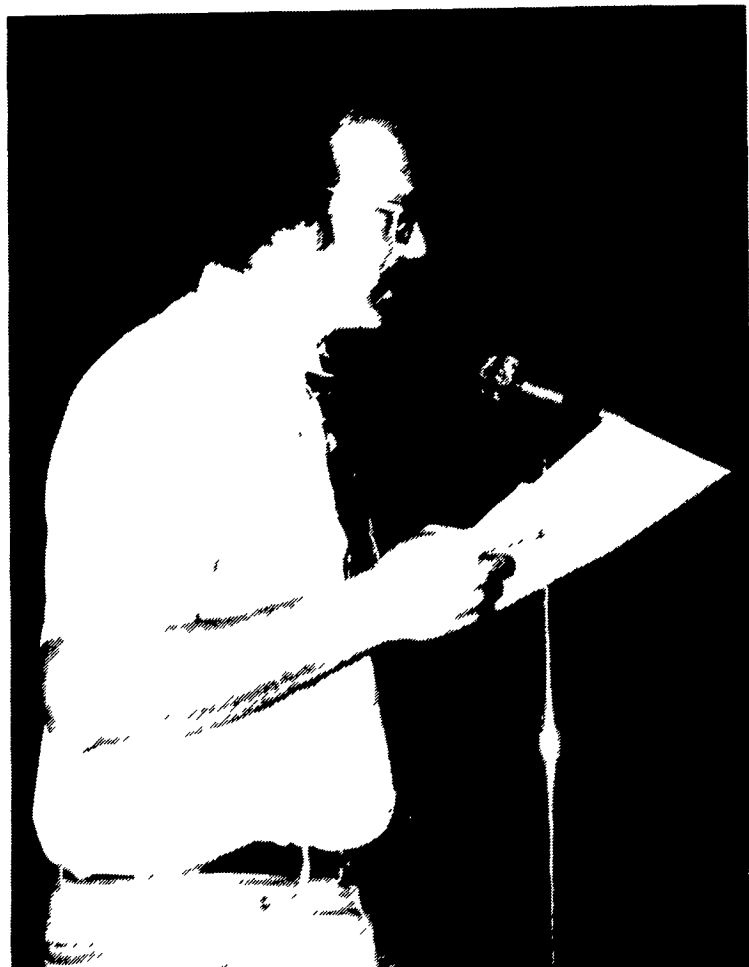
"I can related the encouragement and persuasiveness the ag teachers had on my life," he said. "Without their help and concern, I would not have accomplished or achieved some of the things I have in my life. I do not know of any other program in the school that could have done what the ag program did for me."

Ag isn't needed?

At Monday's meeting, Dale Martin, an Ephrata farmer who lives near the school, asked the board members, "Have we in the Ephrata School District gotten to the point where ag isn't needed anymore?" He asked the board members to think about developing long-range plans regarding the ag program in the school.

In an agriculturally rich area such as Ephrata, cutbacks in ag budgets shouldn't be happening, according to Orr. At Monday night's meeting, he described a survey recently conducted which showed that 80 percent of those who took ag courses in the school took up a career in agribusiness.

"The shame is," said Orr, "if Ephrata was located in the middle of Iowa, I mean, that's all that would be here. There's too much diversity in the county for people to appreciate the ag that's here. The amount of agricultural business in this county is phenomenal. But no one appreciates it."



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