

Ridge Unveils Agriculture Platform

EVERETT NEWSWANGER
Managing Editor
HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)—Maybe gubernatorial candidates in the early history of Pennsylvania developed an agricultural policy platform to run on, but no one has done it in recent memory. No one, that is, until this week at a press conference at the Farm Show where Republican candidate Tom Ridge introduced his "A Plan For Pennsylvania Agriculture: Strengthening Our Greatest Resource."

Ridge called for the strengthening of the state's number one industry and making fundamental changes in the way government works with farmers and food processors. "I would like to build on the traditions that are in the farm

community," Ridge said. "I want Pennsylvania to not only feature farming for the one week of the Farm Show, but I want us to feature farming 52 weeks out of the year."

"Farmers contribute \$40 billion worth of goods, services and wages in Pennsylvania, and it ought to be the business of government in Pennsylvania to help you do business. A productive agriculture is good business for all of Pennsylvania."

Ridge listed five major points to his plan. They are: develop a PDA that knows agriculture; overhaul DER to make it user friendly; put new emphasis on marketing; develop an export-driven economy; and commit to research and development in agriculture.

"You have struggled like every other business in this state under

the burden of high taxes and over-regulation. Your problems are compounded by dealing with individuals in state government who seem to have little or no understanding of the day-to-day decisions and challenges that you face," Ridge said.

"Today, I am laying before you my plan to fight back against the high-tax, no-growth policies that are impeding your ability to compete like every other business. This plan reflects my commitment to less government intrusion, more common sense governing and helping Pennsylvania's agricultural community reach its fullest potential."

"In a Ridge Administration, I will put together a Department of Agriculture with men and women who know agriculture and who understand that the strength of Pennsylvania's economy is only as great as the strength of its agricultural industry."

"My new Department of Environmental Protection will work with you in partnership. I am going to put an end to months of delays for permits and insist that law-abiding individuals are treated as such."

Ridge reiterated his call for overhauling the Department of Environmental Resources to make it "a partner of farmers rather than a prosecutor."

"We can protect the environment in a way that does not bring your ability to compete to a halt," Ridge continued, "Under my Administration, we will."

In addition, "A Plan for Pennsylvania Agriculture" calls for bolstering the efforts of the Department of Agriculture to



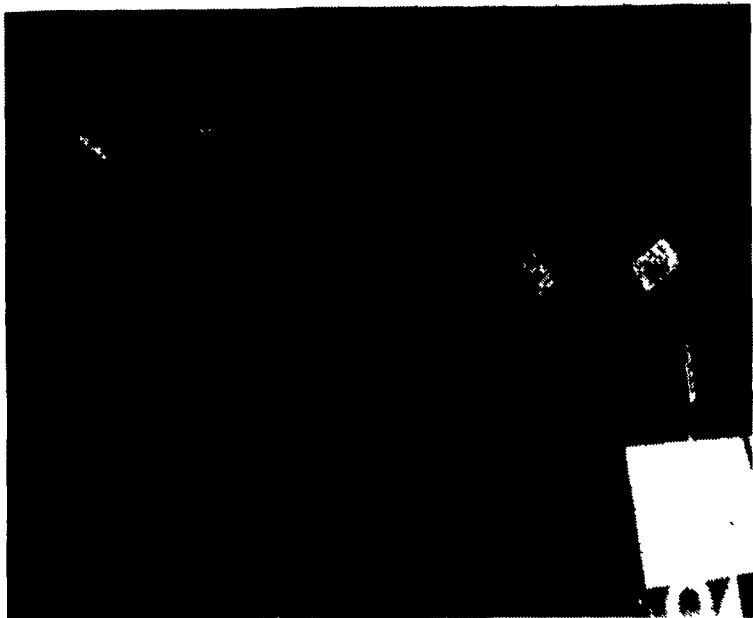
Tom Ridge at the Farm Show news conference.

identify new markets and conduct research into developing state-of-the-art products to meet changing market-conditions and regulations.

Citing the fact that the state's number one industry makes up a small percentage of the state's exports, Ridge called for doubling the amount of farm and farm factory products when he is Governor. Ridge's already-released "Keystone Export Strategy" includes the appointment of agricultural representatives to serve on the Governor's Export Task Force. In addition, Ridge said he believes that trade missions abroad to promote Pennsylvania

products are important, as are reverse trade missions which would bring heads of state and dignitaries here to see first-hand Pennsylvania products.

Ridge was introduced this morning by retired State Representative, Samuel Hayes, who has been a leader in the agricultural community. Hayes pointed out Ridge's broad range of experience in dealing with farming concerns, including his efforts to bring balance to the nation's federal wetlands laws, secure drought relief assistance and ensure a fair market value for milk and dairy products.



Retired State Representative Samuel Hayes, right, introduces Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Ridge at a press conference Monday morning at the Farm Show.

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