

Chester County Offers Info On Clean, Green

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — Chester County has taken steps to update and enhance its "Clean & Green" program, and the Chester County Board of Commissioners said they want to be sure that all eligible landowners are aware of the possible benefits that could be awaiting them.

"Clean & Green" is the common name for Act 319, the Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act. Under Act 319, land parcels of 10 acres or more, which are devoted to agricultural or forest land use, may be assessed at use value rather than fair market value.

According to county officials, the program allows owners of qualifying land the opportunity to enter into an agreement with the county. As part of the agreement, property owners maintain their property in its natural, agricultural or wooded state, and in exchange, receive a reduced real estate tax assessment.

What the county has done, according to Commissioners' Chairman Joseph J. Kenna is identify and digitize soils and replace a time-consuming manual process with a computer.

"We went across the county, took all land parcels of 10 acres or more, digitized the soil types, and computerized that information. We now have accurate, easily accessible information and the technology needed to keep the program current on an ongoing basis," Kenna explained.

21st Century Appraisal, an appraisal firm that specializes in Clean & Green assessments, worked with the county in enhancing the Act 319 process.

Using the information gathered, 21st Century has prepared an Act 319 assessment on every potentially eligible property in the county.

Commissioner Karen L. Martynick said the goal now is to share that information.

"We want to make sure that each landowner has the information they need to make an educated, informed decision about whether or not the Act 319 program is beneficial to them at this time. We want them to be able to physically see how Act 319 would impact them," Martynick said.

Martynick said that each eligible property owner is to receive a letter at the end of February. The letter is to contain the property's market value assessment, the property's projected Act 319 assessment and, if relevant, the property's Act 515 assessment.

For information purposes, the letter will also show the impact of these assessments on the property's county tax, based on the 1993 tax rate.

Commissioner Andrew E. Dinniman said that the true benefits of the updated Act 319 program are more likely to be felt at the time of reassessment.

Dinniman said, "Some property

owners may not see a significant benefit to their 319 numbers right now, but we expect that as we near reassessment they will. At the time of reassessment, Act 319 values will remain fairly constant as they are tied to "use" rather than "fair market value."

The commissioners encourage interested property owners to mark their calendars to attend one of the four upcoming public meetings that have been scheduled to more fully explain and discuss the ins and outs of Act 319.

The public meetings, which will be conducted by Dr. Robert Barr, president of 21st Century Appraisals, in conjunction with other members from the Chester County farming community, will be held:

- Tuesday, March 1, at the Owen J. Robert High School auditorium, Routes 23 and 100, Bucktown at 7:30 p.m.

- Wednesday, March 2, at Honey Brook Fire Company, Railroad Avenue and King Street, Honey Brook at 1 p.m.

- Wednesday, March 2, Unionville Middle School auditorium, 760 Unionville Road (Route 82), Unionville at 7:30 p.m.

- And on Thursday, March 3, at the Octarara High School cafeteria, Highland Road, Atglen at 7:30 p.m.

County officials remind property owners who are, or who may be, interested in enrolling in the Act 319 program for the 1995 tax year, that they must file their application by June 1.

The commissioners point out that the public meetings will deal with general information concerning Act 319. After all of the meetings have been concluded, property owners may contact representatives of 21st Century Appraisals to answer more specific questions

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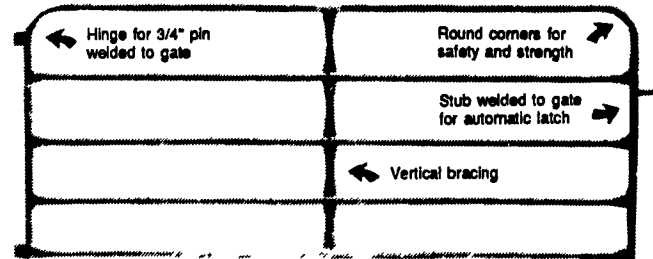
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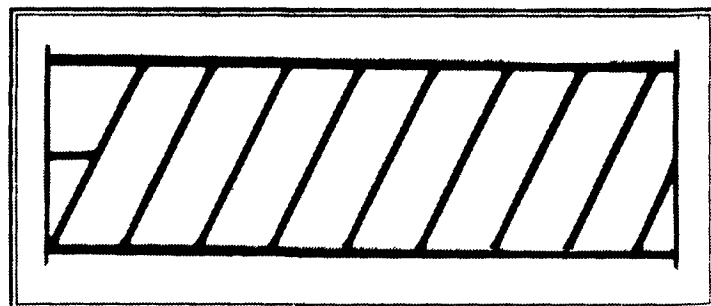
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