

Gov. Casey Requests Supplemental USDA Aid For Fruit Growers

VERNON ACHENBACH, JR.
Lancaster Farming Staff
HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — State Gov. Robert Casey has requested aid from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy to help state fruit growers overcome weather-related production damages which threaten to put some producers out of business.

At the same time, state Secretary of Agriculture Boyd Wolff has requested that U.S. legislators representing Pennsylvania support the passage of U.S. Senate Bill 1614, the Better Nutrition and Health for Children Act, which would again permit the use of food vouchers at farm markets.

In a letter dated June 9, Casey wrote to Espy, "As governor ... I need to inform you about the great jeopardy that Pennsylvania's fruit farmers are in and to explain their plight."

"Winter damage from excessive snowfall and extreme cold temperatures has destroyed most of this year's peach and nectarine crop, and has also caused millions of dollars in damage to farm buildings and machinery."

"Extension agents have reported a total crop loss in Adams, Franklin, and York counties. That is catastrophic to our growers and a critical blow to our commonwealth's economy."

"Ranked number four in the nation in peach production, Pennsylvania's peach trees produced a \$20 million crop in 1993."

Further Casey wrote that additional losses occurred May 26 with high winds and hail that "... devastated apple, pear, plum and cherry crops in Adams and Cumberland

counties."

He said that while assessments are complete from that storm, extension personnel and staff with the USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service have reported "thousands of acres of orchards were damaged ... and individual growers have lost hundreds of thousand of dollars worth of fruit. In addition to Pennsylvania's orchard damage, growers with strawberry crops that were near harvest have lost 50 to 75 percent of their berries."

"Tragically, many growers will not survive without substantial help from the United States Department of Agriculture."

"Neither state nor local government in Pennsylvania has any program available to assist farmers with natural disaster relief."

He requested additional federal aid in addition to the low-interest Farm Home Administration loans for which many counties already qualify.

Further, Casey states that U.S. Sen. Harris Wofford and Secretary Wolff have discussed the matter and that Wofford is expected contact Espy about the matter and to "explore federal assistance that may be available to our farmers."

"I urge you to explore all avenues of relief so that Pennsylvania's fruit farmers can start rebuilding their crops and their lives after such a severe disaster."

Concerning the pending legislation which would again authorize the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Farmer's Market Nutrition Program — a program that enables food purchases, using coupons, at farm markets by eligible pregnant and breastfeeding women — Secretary Wolff also

requested the help of U.S. Sen. Wofford in getting the bill passed.

"WIC/FMNP food dollars this year will purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from 514 Pennsylvania farmers in 239 markets, and in turn, those fruits and vegetables will help 68,500 WIC participants to eat healthier, nutritious food," Wolff said in the letter.

According to the PDA, the WIC/FMNP last year reimbursed \$692,830 to participating farmer-marketers for fresh food purchases

by eligible WIC participants.

The concept of the program is to provide fresh, healthy food to those with limited resources, and to promote the consumption of locally produced food.

Pennsylvania was one of the first 11 states to receive funding under the program started last year. Five hundred farmers in Pennsylvania have been authorized to participate, and can be expected to again, with the successful passage of the legislation.

Lancaster Tobacco Industry

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Martin said.

In addition to taxes, Martin said OSHA also has issued conditions under which you can smoke. "I can't smoke in my home if I have a maid or when I hire a repair person to fix my refrigerator," Martin said. "I can't smoke in a hotel or in my office even if I am in the tobacco business. When I go make a purchase, I can't smoke in the tobacco shop, and I can't smoke in my company car even if I am alone."

"They haven't said if I can smoke on my riding lawn mower,"

Martin said facetiously. "I'll need to call them about that."

Lancaster County farmers have reported that they intend to plant additional 609 cigarette tobacco this year because of the poor price on 41 chewing tobacco last year. But according to Martin, the domestic content law may be changed and catch farmers unprepared. Last year 75 percent of the tobacco used in manufacturing needed to come from the U.S. Since Lancaster County could supply part of the domestic needs, their type 609 was in more demand than type 41. But with a change in

the law, more off-shore tobacco may be imported and decrease the demand for local 609 this year.

In Pennsylvania, tobacco generates \$25 million in farm income and another \$25 million to related service businesses. Taxes on tobacco products in the state generate \$230 million.

"Farms support the backbone of our economy," Martin said. "The sooner people realize this, the better we will be. After they (government regulations and taxes) are finished with the tobacco industry, which farm industry will be next?"

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