

For Boyd Wolff, A Farm Perspective Adds Real Value To His Professional Achievements

Master Farmer was to spend his days during the next eight years in the capital city.

"At the time I had good advice from back home," Wolff said. "They told me, 'Use common sense and always tell the truth.' Yet, I was not ready for the partisan politics and the scrutiny that goes with public life. Being ag secretary is hard work. You do as many things behind the scenes as you do in public accomplishments. I certainly have a greater respect for public workers. There are a lot of good people in government."

As a farmer, Wolff received recognition as a conservationist and for his service to many farm organizations. Through the Pennsylvania Farmers Association, now the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Wolff was exposed to the workings of government through this organization's legislative agenda in both Harrisburg and in Washington, D.C. When it became apparent that some of the people in the Democratic Party seemed to have written off all the area of the state between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to the Republicans, Wolff started a rural organization of farmers to have some influence on the Democratic Party. This effort gave Wolff the opportunity to be named to Pennsylvania's top ag post.

Wolff lists a number of accomplishments in his tenure that give him satisfaction in his work. The farmland preservation program, started in 1989, has permanently protected more than 58,536 acres of prime farmland in the state. And the animal health commission and the ground work for the new animal health laboratory adjacent to the department of agriculture has been the result of this administration's efforts.

In addition, a most recent accomplishment is the food processors residual management program that took a lot of coordination between many agencies and the legislature.

On the other side, Wolff lists two major disappointments. The effort to reform real estate taxation did not pass. And all the milk promotion organizations in the state could not be brought together to work as one unit.

Wolff believes the ag secretary should be a farmer. "If you have been a farmer, you bring a different perspective to government than a person does from academia or political circles. I believe a farmer can make a difference in government," he said.

New regulatory responsibilities have recently been placed in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA). This means not only does the secretary speak for farmers but also this person helps regulate what they do.

Wolff believes it makes sense to have these responsibilities combined. For example, in July, restaurants will be inspected by

persons under the jurisdiction of the secretary of agriculture. This makes sense because all the other points in the food chain are regulated by PDA. Also, sometimes the regulations help keep the problem of one farmer from hurting another farmer. PDA may quarantine one herd with tuberculosis so many other herds are protected.

"When I came to Harrisburg, I was fortunate to have known something about how government operates from my work with PFA," Wolff said. "You don't come here and expect to change everything in a few weeks. You need to work within the system, but you can't lose patience. You just go back and try again. In the eight years I have been here, it never entered my mind that I wanted to quit. In fact, I never thought about it until someone recently asked me the question."

"I have had two very fortunate things happen to me in my career," Wolff said.

The first happened when he was a college student. He said, "My parents struggled to keep the farm going until I could take it over after

I graduated from Penn State."

The second happened when he needed to retire from the farm because of health reasons. "Then I had the opportunity to become secretary of agriculture," he said.

To survive in farming, Wolff believes you need to master four concerns, first being government regulation related to the environment. Federal and state laws must be made so they are tolerable to farmers.

Second, GATT and NAFTA make farming a world economy with a competitive scope to marketing. "We may not be as competitive as we should be," he said.

Third, how we handle biotechnology will determine our future existence as farmers. These new innovations such as BST are here, and we can't ignore them if we are to survive.

And fourth, we need strong consumer advocacy. "We don't mistreat our animals, and we are concerned about the environment. The consumer needs to know this," he said.

"I have been very fortunate to be

ag secretary, and I believe we have accomplished much in the last eight years," he said.

"You ask, 'What am I going to do now?'"

"I must say I don't have any idea what I will do when I leave office. I'm only 63 and not ready to quit. I have a standing joke with Gene Shenk (press secretary) that he should make me a sign for my office that says I will work for anyone who will supply me with good Pennsylvania food."

On Jan. 17 when Wolff leaves office, he and his wife Peggy will continue to live in Harrisburg near their three daughters and families that include a granddaughter. And he will find something to do. But for now this chapter in his life has come to a close. For this ag secretary, subjective insights added greatly to the importance of his professional achievements.

Best wishes, Boyd!



Retiring Pennsylvania Ag Secretary Boyd Wolff and his wife Peggy share a moment at home. Wolff served in Gov. Robert Casey's cabinet for the last eight years.

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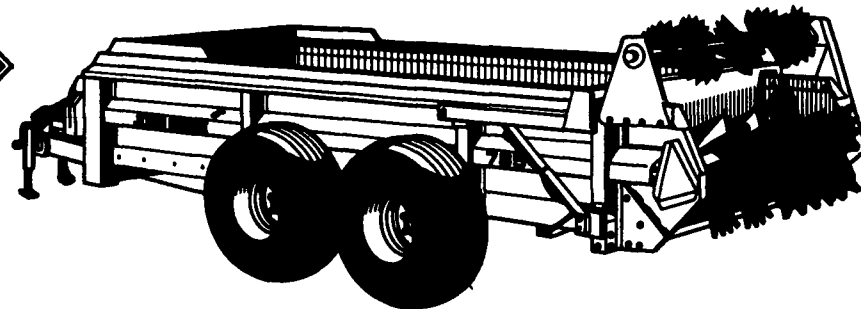
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