

State Grange Meets With Federal Legislators

HARRISBURG (Daupin Co.)—Nearly 100 Pennsylvania State Grangers visited their federal legislators during the annual Washington Legislative Tour to discuss pertinent issues concerning agriculture and rural affairs.

Among the issues discussed during the March 21-22 visit with U.S. Congressman and Senators are the cuts being made to agricultural programs, rural health care reforms, wetlands legislation and food safety proposals.

Brenda Shambaugh, PA State Grange legislative director, said the Washington tour presents an opportunity for the Grange to voice its position on issues that have been developed through the Grange's grass-root policies.

A summary of the issues and Grange policy follows:

Government programs that support agricultural prices and farmers' incomes are facing their most serious attack since the early days of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which the U.S. Supreme Court overturned in 1936.

Congress is proposing to reduce target prices by 3 percent a year. This proposal would reduce government spending in support of agriculture in two simple, but drastic, steps.

It would reduce spending by almost \$15 billion over the next five years. And, it would scuttle export subsidies, which would save \$3.4 billion, and cap off \$11.5 billion by phasing-down crop subsidies.

The Grange, according to Shambaugh, realizes that farm programs are in for an overhaul due to the decreasing number of farmers and, therefore, supports an initiative that would pare down present programs.

"The Grange, like most farm and commodity organizations, favors a shaved-down version of present programs," Shambaugh said. "Reduction in payment acres, reduced or no set-asides,

more flexibility in crop bases and a loan rate that is tied to the average world prices are methods the Grange supports to reach that goal."

The Grange's interest in health care reform dates back decades. At the national level, the Grange has sponsored a multi-year, political, educational and action program called "Health Care in America."

The PA State Grange supports: reform of the insurance market; providing 100 percent deductibility for the self-employed; making coverage for children more affordable; helping workers who lose their jobs to keep coverage; and making a wide range of home and community-based options accessible and affordable for families that are caring for a sick parent or disabled child.

The Grange opposes employer mandates, government intervention except to revise current laws and regulations and raising taxes to pay for health care reforms.

"The Grange is continuing its fight to bring about health care reform," Shambaugh said. "The Targeted Individual Health Insurance Reform Act focuses on individual health insurance reforms and portability, non-discrimination, renewability and fair rating standards. It also limits an insurance company's ability to use pre-existing conditions to deny coverage."

The Grange, along with a coalition of 13 other national farm groups, are addressing their concerns regarding a Memorandum of Agreement that put the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service, as the lead federal agency for delineating wetlands on agricultural land as part of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

"Unfortunately, the MOA is not meeting its stated goals and should be modified immediately"

the Grange wrote in a letter to President Bill Clinton.

"The problem the Grange has with the MOA is that although its purpose was to put the NRCS in charge of wetlands delineation or agricultural land, the actual language of the agreement allows the Environmental Protection Agency to preempt such authority," Shambaugh said. "Technical changes need to be made to the MOA to truly place the NRCS in charge of agricultural land delineations and provide a consistent determination for farmers and ranchers from all federal agencies."

The Grange is seeking a moratorium on the MOA and delineations of agricultural wetlands until passage of the 1995 Farm Bill and is supporting legislation introduced by Bud Shuster, R-PA, that creates an administrative appeals

process for wetlands determinations and would authorize the state revolving loan fund program at \$2 billion a year.

The bill also seeks to provide greater recognition of different wetland functions and values, procedural rights and private property rights, according to Shambaugh.

The Grange backs the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) attempt to incorporate scientific testing of meats and poultry to achieve systematic prevention of food contamination.

A USDA proposal would require the nation's nearly 6,200 federally-inspected meat and poultry slaughter and processing plants to adopt science-based process control systems called Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP).

"This program would identify

potential food safety hazards that arise in slaughter and processing plants and would build-in science-based preventive controls," Shambaugh said. "The Grange supports any program that further ensures our food supply is wholesome and safe for consumers."

Included in the trek to the nation's capital were a congressional breakfast with legislators, a meeting with Pennsylvania's senators and House and Senate Agriculture Committee staff members and tours of the National Cathedral, Union Station and the DAR Museum.

The Pennsylvania State Grange is a rural/farm organization with 33,000 members in 475 local Granges across the state. They Pennsylvania State Grange is committed to improving the lives of rural Pennsylvanians through legislative initiatives, community service and providing services to its members.

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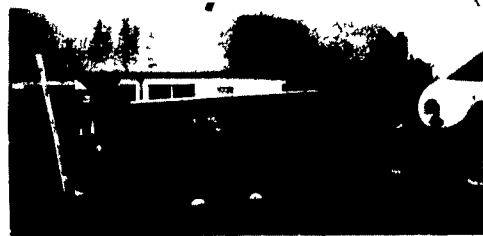
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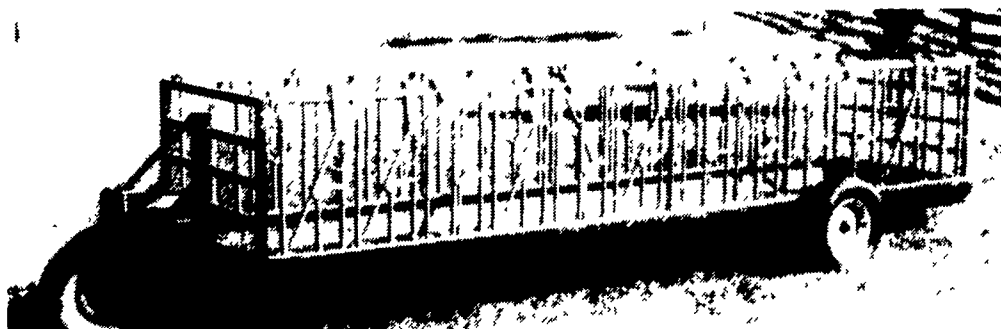
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