

Legislature Finishes, Work To Continue

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availability dictate.

Grangers set the policy in the belief that it would allow rural communities to maintain or get lower rates.

That deregulation was approved by the Legislature, though it is not clear what will be the end result. Electric providers build plants and make plans when setting and requesting rate approvals from the state Public Utility Commission for the costs associated with dismantling the power plants.

Companies with nuclear power plants, for example, have planned for years ahead to use known income to meet government regulations.

For example, Three-Mile Island is supposed to be eventually decommissioned and plans have previously been made to return the Middletown-vicinity island to a condition that has no evidence of the nuclear plant.

The effect of the paper-electric trade expected to result from deregulation could be to deny companies with significant investment in materials a proper return on that investment to make proper maintenance or closure.

Other questions include such things as who is to be responsible for providing line service to or within a dwelling, if the company selling electricity is merely a user of the wire.

According to Shambaugh, two other achievements of the Legislature include passage of Senate Bill 1371 and House Bill 1886.

SB 1371 changed the definition of agriculture in the Right to Farm

Act to expand it to include the right to conduct on-farm processing activities associated with a family farm operation, such as drying grain and sawing wood, which some have charged is not farming but industrial and therefore not allowed under agricultural zoning.

That issue should be moot, for now.

HB 1886 is an answer to a question that had been asked more and more frequently since the advent of the Farmland Preservation Act several years ago.

The legislation makes it clear that a farm receiving protection from development under the Farmland Protection Act must also continue to receive the protections afforded under the Agricultural Security Area program.

Under the ASA program, condemnations of farm land for schools and highways, etc., are to be difficult to achieve.

Farmland has to be included within an Agricultural Security Area as a prerequisite to being preserved under the Farmland Protection Program.

However, ASAs have a seven-year life.

The question arose: What happens to farmland "protected" from development forever, when it loses its basic protections under a less-than-forever foundation program?

HB 1886 requires that townships have to allow a farm that participates in farmland preservation to always have the protections of an Agricultural Security Area.

In other areas, for rural residents, especially the elderly on fixed incomes who make just over the

cut-off amount for eligibility on state lottery funded prescription medicine benefits, the Legislature passed, and the governor signed, a law that creates a higher income level for the basic program and adds a second tier of limited eligibility for the prescription program.

It also approved the Domestic Animal Act, which is significant because it created new definitions of domestic animals, recodified laws, and allows the state the ability to control and monitor animal disease.

Previously, exotic animals, such as ostriches, elk and deer, were outside the purview of the PDA and the health laws. That made it difficult to control diseases such as bovine tuberculosis which has been appearing in domesticated deer and elk, which can spread it to cows, but the state had been unable to require the same health check and disease preventative measures for those animals.

The failure of some laws was also applauded by Shambaugh and others, such as a proposal from a representative to eliminate the authority of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board to set minimum retail prices for drinking milk.

"The fact that we were able to continue the PMMB without having significant changes in its authority, for instance retail pricing, and the fact that we've been able to prove that the PMMB is a viable entity for all dairy farmers across the state and that the industry needs the board to ensure a reasonable farm price, shows that we can be successful in communicating agriculture's message to the

Legislature," Shambaugh said.

"Agriculture did well with the General Assembly, which is good for the state, because ag is the leading industry in state. Not only does ag benefit, but every resident of the state benefits.

State Rep. Raymond Bunt, majority chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, said, "I'm very pleased with the accomplishments of the House Ag Committee in the latest Legislative session. We had a full plate in front of us, and we tackled the issues in a bipartisan effort.

"We've given the (PDA) the tools it needed to fix the programs that people have been very critical of," he said.

Though some of the issues that people want settled — such as local tax reform and the accepting of aquaculture as deserving of full agricultural protections — were left unresolved by the Legislature, Bunt said that doesn't mean the effort is over.

"Though the session is over, and we technically have to start from the ground, the headway made on these yet unresolved issues should not be lost."

Regional Program Looks For Innovative Ideas

BURLINGTON, Vt. — Applications are now available for The Northeast Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program's 1997 Farmer/Grower Grants Program. The region will award approximately \$100,000 in grants to farmers to try innovative production and marketing techniques.

The grants will be awarded on a competitive basis to farmers throughout the 12-state region. Projects may involve small research trials, educational activities, and demonstrations. Project activities should promote good stewardship of natural resources, prevent agricultural pollution, improve farm profitability, and/or enhance quality of life.

Projects must be under the direction of a at least one producer, and collaboration with other producers and other members of the agricultural community is strongly encouraged.

SARE is a USDA competitive grants program with regional leadership and decision making. Created in the 1985 Farm Bill, the program has funded hundreds of projects that help advance knowledge about farm practices that are profitable, environmentally sound, and socially beneficial.

Northeast Region SARE Farmer/Grower Grant applications are available by contacting SARE at Hills Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082, (802) 656-0471. Email: msimpson@moose.uvm.edu.

The Farmer/Grower Grant application deadline is Dec. 6, 1996.

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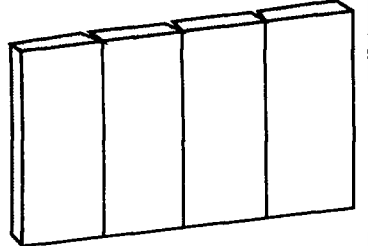
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