

Pa. Farm Bureau Holds Membership Rally

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the off-farm work was to provide health benefits for the family. He said that while some may be working off-farm to support their farming activities, he believes that in addition to health benefits, those who work off-farm do so to help minimize the impact of volatile commodity prices, such as happened recently with milk prices.

"It's not because they have time, not because they are paying for expensive vacations, but (they work off-farm) to supplement (farm income) during price lows," he said.

Redding said the outlook for agriculture can remain good if it is kept in mind that increased production needs increased markets.

He said that the United States has one of the slowest population growth rates in the world, at 1-percent per year, while agricultural production increases by 2- to 2.5-percent per year. That extra production must be exported, if prices are to remain stable.

Other issues that are affecting some and can be expected to affect other producers include country specific prerequisites to accepting products into their country.

With the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the recent General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade which became the World Trade Organization for settling trade disputes among the member nations, Redding said that producers, primarily exporters, are going to have to work with the state Department of Agriculture which is going to have to work the federal government and become adept at finding ways to achieve compliance with another country's requirements for product treatment standards.

For example, he said that the export of Christmas trees from Pennsylvania to Mexico was held up because Mexico required the trees to be sprayed with a pesticide that is banned in the United States.

To work around the problem, Pennsylvania worked with Mexico

to develop a testing and certification program to document and verify that the Christmas trees were free of the pest of concern. Now, Christmas trees are exported to Mexico.

Redding said that as nations around the world attempt to increase the standard of living for its middle class, that protectionist regulations and standards can be expected to be implemented and work will have to be done to help exporting concerns overcome obstacles.

It's a new role for state departments of agriculture, Redding said, becoming involved in product or commodity specific issues in trade disputes.

Food safety is also a concern and ties into the role of the PDA to help ensure compliance and public trust.

Another issue of which farmers should be aware concerns the commodity marketing programs and mandatory deductions for promotions.

Redding said that a U.S. Supreme Court is considering a case in which California peach and nectarine growers are challenging the constitutionality of their industry promotion program by claiming that it is a violation of the First Amendment to force people to pay for expressing an opinion that may not be their own.

The outcome of that case could have wide implications for the rest of agriculture, he said.

He also touched on the current dairy situation and said that while dairy prices did decline sharply, that it is turning around quickly and prices should recover soon.

In addition, he said that Secretary Brosius recently sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman praising him for the actions taken to stem the drop in milk prices due to the drop in cheese prices on the National Cheese Exchange.

Redding said that Pennsylvania has requested an options pilot

program. He said that the New York Cocoa/Coffee/Sugar Exchange would allow futures trading on milk and the pilot program would allow for all commissions to be paid by the government for six months while producers in a six-county area are given the ability to use the market.

Further, he said that those dairy producers who have some ideas about what the Basic Formula Price should look like, and perhaps have contrived a formula to achieve a better basic price, or just have some ideas to share, should take the opportunity to do so now.

He said that Secretary Glickman is seeking input on the issue, and, "It's not often the federal government asks," Redding said.

One of the goals of the PDA is to help relieve farmers from the burden of excessive regulations and a series of time-consuming inspections. He said the goal is not to reduce the quality of product or safety assurances, but rather to seek whether certain regulations are necessary or if there is a better way of achieving the goals such regulation was created to achieve.

Redding said the outlook is good. "We are extremely optimistic about all the change," he said.

With a strong work ethic, a climate that is conducive to agriculture (even though the best land is still being chewed up through liberal allowances for residential and retail development), a strong support of infrastructure such as highways, the fact that more than 50 percent of the United States population as well as 60 percent of Canada's population is within a 24-hour trip by a refrigerated truck of Pennsylvania farmers, a governor who understands the importance of agriculture and a good agriculture secretary, "All of this translates into a very solid base to support agriculture."

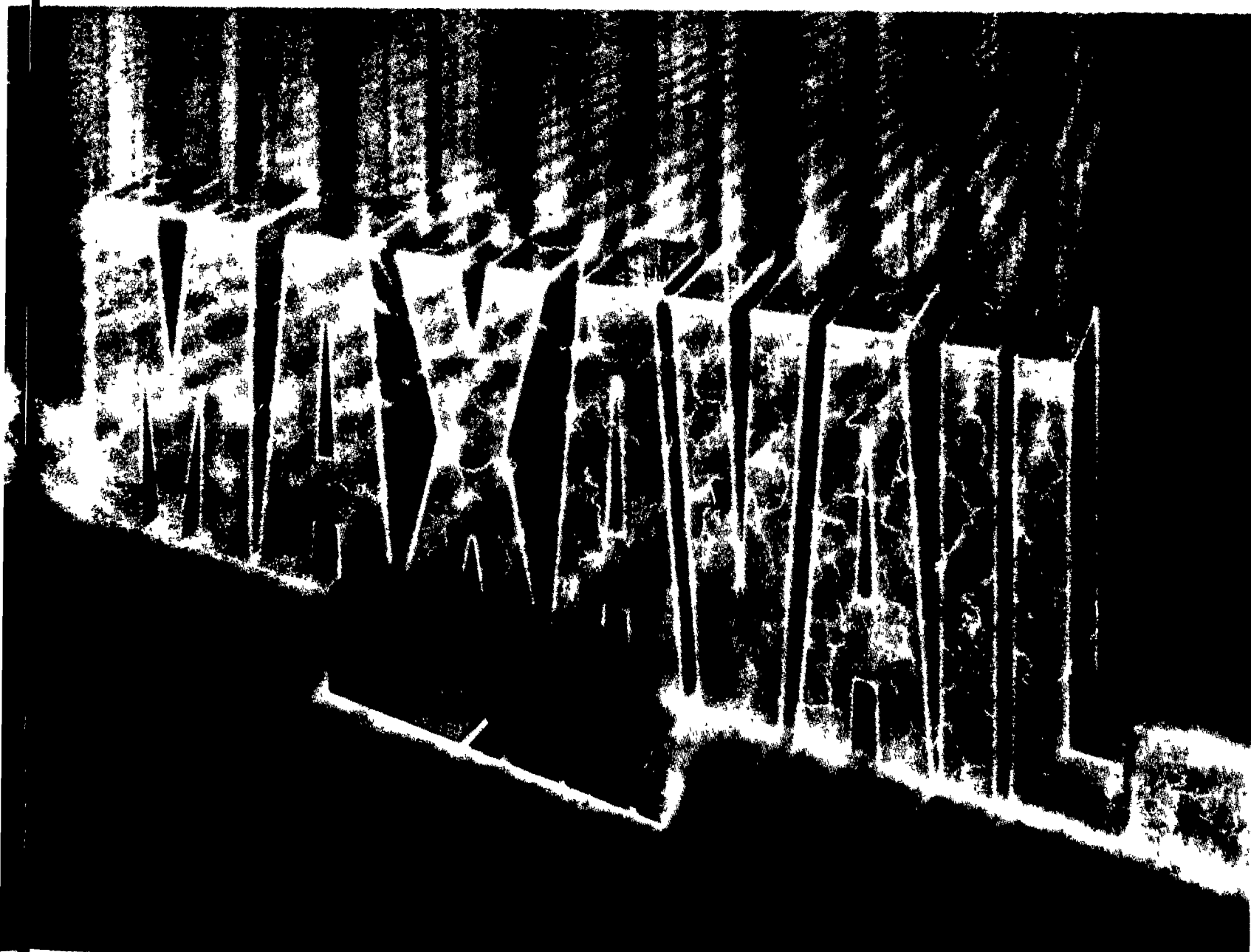
He said that all of the issues discussed are not to be solved alone by government. They require a constant communication between the agricultural community and the PDA.

Afterward, Redding fielded questions from the floor — several of which were actually comments than question — which dealt with local tax reform, local interpretations of definitions in the state's Act 319 Clean and Green preferential tax law, reform of the municipal code and local zoning.

Also, it was asked why public sewer and water lines were apparently easy to run through farmland enrolled in an official Agricultural Security Area, since it would do nothing but encourage developers to target that property for their use and also cause the tax rates to increase further helping to separate farmer from land.

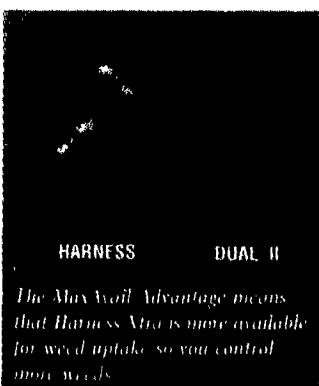
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