

Berlin Young Farmers Hear About Deregulation Of Electricity

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Somerset Co. Correspondent
BERLIN (Somerset Co.) — The Berlin Young Farmers, after thoughtfully listening to the unbiased presentation that Dennis Buffington gave about the deregulation of electricity in Pennsylvania, as the meeting closed, gravitated into threesomes and foursomes for spontaneous and low-voiced discussions.

"We must prepare. I'm convinced there are going to be benefits," Buffington said.

"There's no doubt everybody will be affected by deregulation, how we buy electricity and how we use electricity," he predicted. "Enjoy your supper while you can," he quipped.

Simply, that means the power companies, will also do product campaigning at family mealtimes when deregulation of electricity is in full swing. Don't make any spur-of-the-moment decisions. Ask for printed material and think about the information.

Many choices will be available, resulting in a confusing maelstrom of information for some Pennsylvanians.

"The Key is education. Know how much electricity costs now so you can compare," the professor said, advising the meeting attendees.

Farmers should be taking a hard look at their current electrical usage to determine per kilowatt hour their cost of operating. Making some adjustments now is plain good sense in order to shop the competitive market later.

To accomplish this, he/she first must understand the utility bill which lists generation, transmission, distribution, local service and tax on separate lines.

Know which machines and equipment pieces in the operation are the primary users of electricity. Vacuum pump, milk refrigeration equipment and silo unloader, for instance.

Start managing the electrical demand by staggering the use of these items, especially if you are an "on-demand," charge customer.

Calculate the cost of electricity to produce 100 pounds of milk, a dozen of eggs, a pound of meat, a flat of bedding plants or a bushel of fruit.

Commercial business owners would figure their cost per customer, Buffington said.

Additionally, know what's happening with developing technology regarding the more efficient motors designed to reduce electrical consumption.

Sometimes, because the savings will be realized in daily usage seen over the long haul, such an investment is well worth the initial cash

outlay.

Think smart, however. Only a thorough study of its potential value to the operation should precipitate such an important investment by those concerned with it.

Doyle Paul who buys electricity from his municipality wondered how deregulation would affect the arrangement.

"Berlin borough has its own electricity and sells out to customers," he reported.

"Most municipal power systems will be sticking with the systems they have now," Buffington replied.

Some three representatives from the Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative — one of the state's 13 rural cooperatives — agreed that the information Buffington presented was neutral in content.

Two rural cooperatives, with eight electric companies are participating in the pilot program. The Somerset REC, according to its representatives, isn't one of them.

"Your utility company wants to keep you as a customer," Buffington said. "They will answer all your questions."

In fact, the state Public Utilities

Commission has developed guidelines for the deregulation process that include universal service and energy conservation programs; consumer education; support to low-income consumers and reliability of the electricity supply.

The deregulation phasing in process by January 1, 2001, will give choice to all customer classes in Pennsylvania.

The pilot programs are providing a deregulated environment in which both utility companies and some customers, before Jan. 1, 1999 are experiencing how it operates.

One-third of the customers will then make the choice of an electric utility company official.

Local providers of electricity, as now will continue to maintain the systems in their areas, even if the customer's provider is in another state and each month pays that company for the kilowatt hours of electricity used.

The Cooperative extension offices and the Public Utilities Commission have fact sheets and detailed information for interested persons.

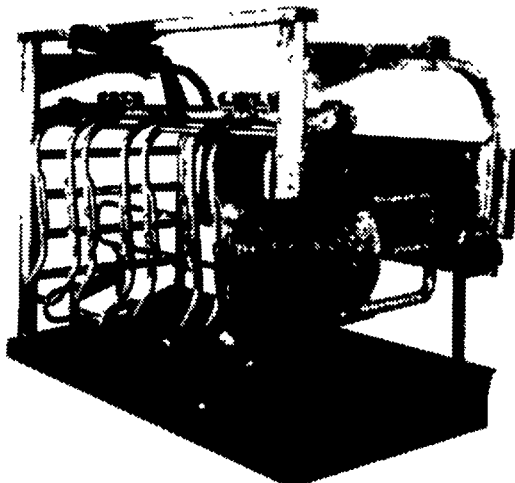
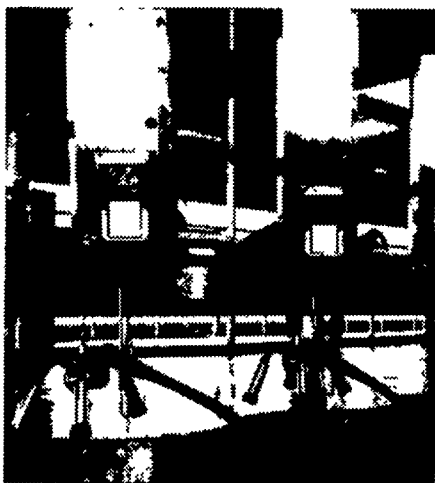
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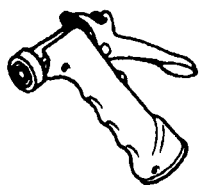
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Agronomy School March 4

POTTSVILLE (Schuylkill Co.) — The 1998 Tri-County Agronomy School will be presented by Penn State Cooperative Extension from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Wednesday, March 4, at the elementary school/community center in Gratz.

Reservations (\$5 per person) are required and can be made by contacting J. Allan Shoener at the Schuylkill County/Penn State Cooperative Extension Office, 1202 Ag Center Drive, Pottsville, PA 17901, (717) 622-4225, or Jerry Martin at the Dauphin County/Penn State Cooperative Extension Office, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018, (717) 921-8803. Reservations are due by Monday, Feb. 23.

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