

USDA Announces EQIP Funds For Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Janet Oertly announced Pennsylvania's funding allocation for 1998 under USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

NRCS in Pennsylvania received \$4.18 million for technical, educational and financial assistance for projects under EQIP.

"This program will help producers address some of the most critical natural resource concerns, such as soil erosion, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat and wetlands," Oertly said. "More productive croplands, cleaner water, and better wildlife will benefit all Pennsylvania residents."

Under EQIP, USDA can provide cost-share assistance to family-sized farms and ranches for up to 75 percent of the cost of certain environmental protection practices, such as grassed waterways, filter strips, manure management facilities, capping abandoned wells, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

USDA also may provide incentive payments to encourage producers to apply such land management practices as nutrient, manure, irrigation water, wildlife, and integrated pest management.

This fiscal year, 75 percent of the cost-share funds will be targeted toward local resource issues in 13 watersheds, and 35 percent will be used to address statewide resource concerns involved with crop production and livestock and poultry production.

Local groups, consisting of federal, state and local agencies and interested national resource organizations submitted proposed water sheds from across the state for consideration.

From the proposed watersheds, or geographic priority areas, 27 were selected by Oertly, in conjunction with the State Technical Committee, and USDA's Farm Service Agency.

With the funding split recommended by the State Technical

Committee, 13 of the top geographic priority area proposals will be fully funded this fiscal year. These areas have significant soil, water, or related natural resource concerns.

Each geographic priority area will announce its own sign-up periods, Oertly said.

Producers located outside of the priority watersheds can become involved in the program through the two statewide resource concerns. The sign-up period for the statewide resource concerns will be announced in the next few weeks.

A conservation plan is needed for all EQIP contracts, which are five to 10 years in length.

NRCS, county conservation district staffs, and staff of the Extension Service will provide the technical and educational assistance producers need to apply or install conservation practices based on their conservation plan, Oertly said. The plan will describe

conservation and management practices to protect soil, water, air or related natural resources.

With an annual national budget of \$200 million authorized through 2002, EQIP is USDA's largest conservation program designed to conserve and improve land while it remains in agricultur-

al production.

EQIP was authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill to address agriculture's priority natural resource and environmental problems. It reflects the commitment of USDA and the Congress for a flexible, effective, voluntary conservation program for agricultural land.

York County Farmers

(Continued from Page A34)

"We have always encouraged citizens to go through the appeals process if they are unhappy with an assessment valuation," adds Commissioner Reilly. "And we have instructed our solicitor to have the hearing take place as quickly as possible within the necessary time frame."

And, on a personal note, Reilly says he is happy that the farmers' group is initially taking the appeals route, as opposed to legal action. With farm-owning relatives, Reilly adds that is well-versed in the concern over the increased cost farmers will face from the increased property assessments.

Grain produced Bill Buser, East Prospect, a former president of the

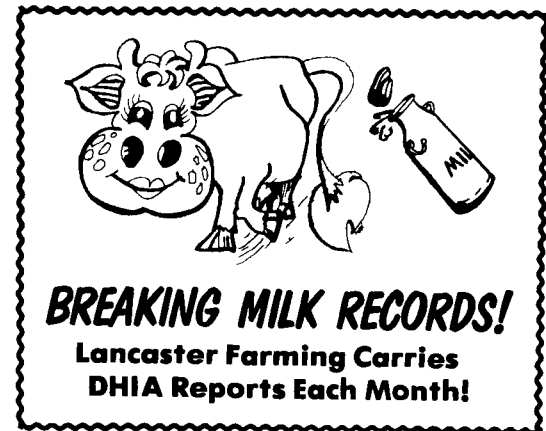
county's Farm Bureau, chairs the FYRC. Buser is no newcomer to property assessment issues, having first gotten involved in them when his family constructed a new hog production barn several years ago.

"We knew we had to take the action that we did," affirms Buser of the appeal of the reassessment valuations. "And we've been getting lots of calls from people who want to be part of it."

"But," he emphasizes, "if they're not already signed up in Clean and Green, we can't help."

Property owners seeking more information on the FRYC may contact Buser at 717-755-3271 or Kilgore at 717-862-3117.

WATERSHED	FY 98 ALLOCATION	
	FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE
Neshaminy Creek	\$180,000	\$1,000
Chickies Creek	\$300,000	\$4,000
Middle Creek	\$80,000	\$1,000
Evitts Creek	\$52,000	\$0
Tunkhannock Creek	\$300,000	\$3,000
Pigeon Creek/Pike Run	\$150,000	\$2,000
Ten Mile Creek	\$150,000	\$2,000
Codorus Creek	\$240,000	\$1,500
Crooked Creek-Cowanshannock Creek	\$300,000	\$1,500
Chillisquaque Creek	\$150,000	\$1,200
Shamokin-Mahanoy Creek	\$200,000	\$1,600
Upper Monocacy	\$217,000*	\$2,000
Conodoguinet Creek	\$138,000*	\$300
Statewide Resource Concerns	\$747,000	\$10,000



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