

York Farmers File Property Tax Lawsuit

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class action suit in the York County Court of Common Pleas. And, tax protest letters are already turning up at municipal tax collectors' offices around the county.

Joyce Smith, tax collector for the northern end's Warrington Township, had as of last week received tax protest letters. She was expecting more.

In the county's southern corner, Chanceford Township tax collector Henry Tyson had more.

"I've gotten about a dozen," he affirmed late last week. "But the big rush comes the first two weeks of April, right before the discount period ends. I expect quite a few."

Springfield Township, in the county's southcentral area, had not seen any of the protest letters as of last week, though tax collector Barbara Metzler had gotten inquiries. She explained that the escrowed money must be held in a separate account set up by each taxing municipality, school district and the county, with the tax collectors doing the initial paperwork.

"We must calculate the 25 percent protest amount on each tax, and send a note to the county treasurer's office about the protested bill," she explained. The tax collector's forwarding payments to the county treasurer's office must

be made with two checks, keeping the 25 percent protest amount to be escrowed separate from the regular tax payment.

"It's extra work, but that's part of our job," Metzler said.

The farmers' tax revolt boiled up following the county's real estate reassessment last year, when hundreds of York County farmers and landowners were stunned upon receiving their new tax appraisals. Some values had tripled under the new assessment, meaning tax bills would take three times their prior bite.

In a year in which York County farmers were smitten with one of the area's worst droughts in memory, tax bills as much as tripled came as a bitter blow.

The farmer's group has taken issue with several of the reassessment criteria, including lack of recognition for greatly varying productivity levels among the range of soil types across York County. And, assessment values are reportedly higher than that on similar soils in neighboring counties. So many taxpayers filed appeals to the county's Assessment Board that the individual hearings, which were to have been completed by the end of 1997, stretched into February of 1998.

The "under protest" mailing comes on the heels of an earlier

one, sent January 29, in which the committee encouraged Clean and Green property owners to join in a class action filing against the York County Assessment Board. That letter polled recipients on their tax assessment problems and willingness to testify if necessary. Letter recipients were further invited to contribute financial support, based on their acreage, to help find anticipated legal costs. Response, according to the committee, has been gratifying.

"We are very, very pleased with the financial support we've seen from York County's farmers and landowners," says FRYC chairman Buser.

"We've had a great reply to our first letter. We've gotten maybe over a thousand responses and probably 70 percent of those people are willing to testify," Buser adds. "There are some real horror stories, older landowners, often with medical problems. They have no idea how they are going to pay their tax bills."

Gatchelville fruit growers Gail and Paul McPherson have experienced first-hand Buser's concerns over the tax bills' effect on the many of county's older landowners. Upon opening her tax reassessment last fall, one elderly, widowed friend of the McPherson's called them for help, pleading

with Paul's assistance in dealing with her property's reappraisal.

"Our older landowners have been good, solid, hard-working citizens of the community. Many of them don't have huge retirement funds and they budget every cent they have carefully. These kind of tax bills may simply drive

them out of their homes," Gail McPherson worries.

Affected York County Clean and Green valued property owners, and any other individuals seeking more information on the tax protest, may contact FRYC chairman Bill Buser at (717) 755-3271.

Marketing Opportunities On The Turnpike

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) - Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes Jr. announced that the department is seeking producers interested in operating stands at farmers' markets throughout the Pennsylvania Turnpike system during the 1998 growing season.

"Launched by Gov. Tom Ridge, this program demonstrates the Ridge Administration's continued commitment to finding new markets for Pennsylvania-grown products," said Hayes. "Gov. Ridge has worked to expand not only the export market for farmers, but also the domestic market through innovative and strategic methods.

"Since the Turnpike Farmers' Markets began three years ago, the markets have proven to be very popular with the traveling public and have provided farmers a great new marketing

opportunity. The markets are at the service plazas at Allentown, Lehigh County; New Stanton, Westmoreland County; Sideling Hill, Fulton County; and Valley Forge, Chester County. Although many vendors will be returning for 1998, there will be opportunities for additional vendors at each of the markets.

Pennsylvania producers who grow more than 50 percent of their total sales are eligible to participate. The vendors may supplement their own production with produce that also is Pennsylvania-grown.

Farmers interested in becoming vendors at any of the markets may request an application by contacting Mike Varner, Bureau of Market Development, 2301 N. Cameron St. Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408. The telephone number is (717) 787-2376.

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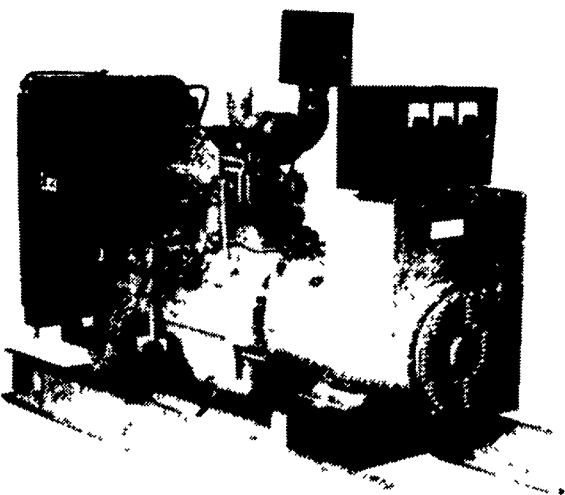
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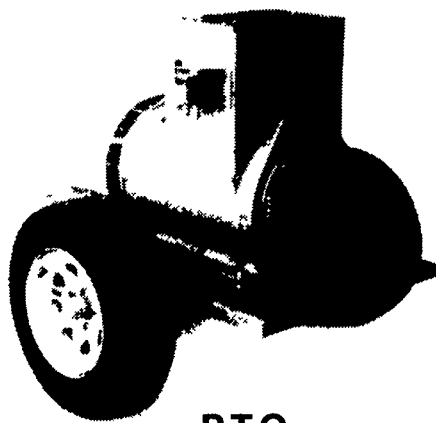
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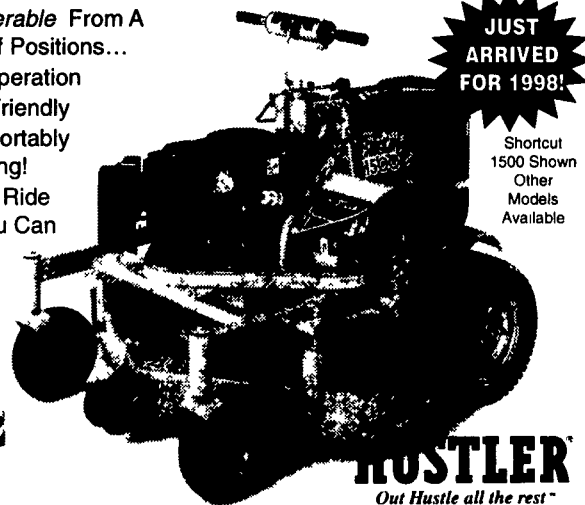
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