

Pa. State Grange Members Meet Federal Legislators

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Nearly 100 Pennsylvania State Grangers visited with their federal legislators during the annual Washington Legislative Tour to discuss issues concerning agriculture and rural affairs.

Among the issues discussed during the March 18-19 visit with U.S. Congressmen and Senators were dairy compacts, reforming the federal tax system, revitalization of rural schools and improving the rural health care system, among others.

The Pennsylvania State Grange, with over 30,000 members in 450 Grange chapters across the commonwealth, is dedicated to improving the lives of rural Pennsylvanians through legislative action, grass-roots initiatives, community service and offering member services like financial planning, a credit union and insurance programs.

Brenda Shambaugh, PA State Grange legislative director, said the Washington tour presents an opportunity for individual Grange members to voice their position on issues that have been developed through the Grange's grass-root efforts.

"The visit to Washington was to speak out on behalf of the National Grange's Blueprint for Rural America," Shambaugh said. "The 10-point plan is designed to revitalize and enhance rural America in preparation for the new mil-

lennium. The blueprint is part of the National Grange's program called, 'A New Century, A New Grange'."

The Grange believes Congress should authorize the formation of regional dairy compacts to provide a more stable pricing structure for producers and consumers. Reducing the number of milk marketing orders will lead to a more streamlined system of pricing, marketing and distribution of dairy products, as well as better regional accountability.

"Like New England's successful Northeast Dairy Compact, other dairy-producing regions can benefit from the establishment of similar compacts to promote cooperative pricing and marketing systems," Shambaugh said. "The Northeast Dairy Compact, which the Pennsylvania State Grange diligently work to get created, is a proven success for our neighbors to the north, and we seek the same for Pennsylvania producers."

Shambaugh said the National Grange feels Congress should reform the federal tax system to assure preservation of family farms and businesses through the elimination of estate and capital gains taxes, and institute user taxes to offset costs of federal programs. Moreover, Congress must also reverse the Internal Revenue Service's 1996 disqualification of farmers from receiving tax credits on sale of culled cattle.

"A new system is needed to as-

sure that all wealth bears its just and equal payment to the government," Shambaugh said. "A family farm is a family business and plays a key role in the economic well-being of rural areas across America."

Another blueprint issue of the National Grange concerns the revitalization of rural schools through federal partnerships.

The National Grange supports using federal resources to revitalize rural schools by forming federal/state partnerships to renovate them. The revitalization project should include the provision of federal funds for rural school districts seeking assistance, and could include buying down interest rates on local bonds to finance school construction projects.

"Such partnerships should protect and retain local control, since traditionally, school construction and renovations have been the sole province of state and local governments," Shambaugh said. "Federal partnerships will help improve the health of rural economies, which are often dependent upon a quality learning environment."

Other key issues discussed in Washington include:

Rural Health Care — The Grange looks to ensure a quality health system through equal support by protecting rural residents' health care through assured equality of rates and services with urban

areas, according to Shambaugh.

"Medicare recipients, hospitals and doctors should receive equal consideration, costs and services with other regions of the United States," Shambaugh said. "This should include rural-specific reimbursement rates to managed care organizations and designation of 'limited service hospitals' in rural communities."

Highway Trust Fund — The Grange urges Congress to earmark highway users' taxes and other related funds for rural road, highway and bridge improvements.

"Enhanced transportation networks that link rural communities to urban centers are critically important," Shambaugh said. "Congress must assure that trust funds within the Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act are not diverted to non-highway use, and should extend the current High Trust Fund until the year 2000."

Private Property Rights — The Grange is asking legislators to support the preservation of America's farmland for the survival of the family farm, Shambaugh said, through responsible environmental protection and protection of farmers' property rights. Congress should develop the framework for local community action in farmland preservation and should be re-authorize the Endangered Species Act to preserve the important ecological balance. Both initia-

tives should afford rural land owners "safe harbor" protection from undue regulatory regulations.

Global Climate Treaty — The National Grange is calling for the revision of the Global Climate Treaty to include all 160 nations to make it fair and equitable.

"The Clinton Administration's current plan to include only the United States and 30 other developing nations — and to exclude the other 130 'developing' nations — will handicap U.S. producers in competing for important international markets," Shambaugh said. "The resulting economic impact on rural communities will be significant. The Grange is working to keep this situation from having a devastating effect on the economy of this country."

Included in the trek to the nation's capital were a congressional luncheon with legislators, a meeting with Pennsylvania's senators, House and Senate agriculture committee staff members and United States Department of Agriculture officials and tours of the White House, the Federal Bureau of Investigation building and other local points of interest.

To learn more about the Pennsylvania State Grange, the National Grange's Blueprint for Rural America or the legislative work of the Grange, call the Pennsylvania State Grange at 1-800-552-3865 or the National Grange at 1-888-447-2643.



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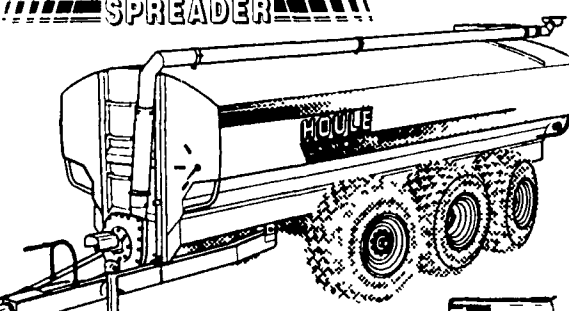
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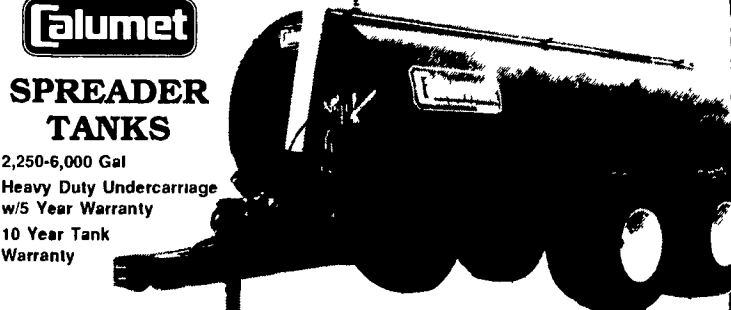


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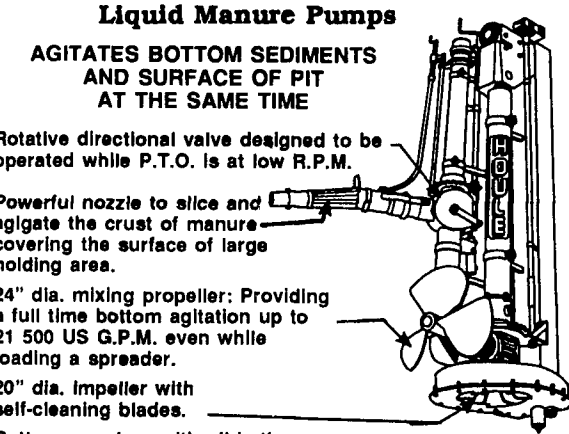
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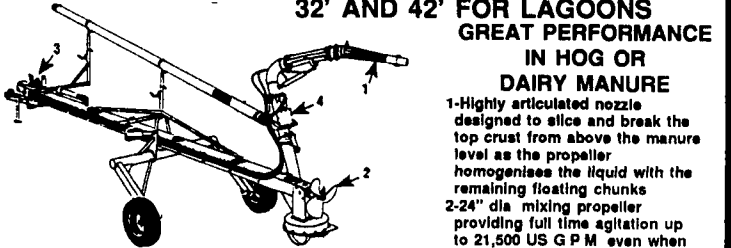
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