

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Discusses Topical Issues

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CAMP HILL (Cumberland Co.) — As part of its public education effort to beneficially influence state and federal legislation, and thereby the lives of its membership, the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau on Monday held a special meeting with representatives of the farm and general media.

In recent years, as part of its annual legislative effort to represent its farmer members and serve better as a proponent for agriculture, the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has held an annual press day.

During the press day, reporters with the general and farm press, especially those working for publications directly associated with farming, are invited to sit down with the elected leadership of the PFB, its communications managers and the issue specialists, and discuss issues of concern to the PFB and the news media.

The event includes a background briefing of PFB positions on issues, additional comments and explanations by leadership, questions from the media representatives, and explanations for those positions and questions.

Not only is the event a forum to present PFB policy positions on issues, but it serves as an opportunity for media to access the main leadership body of the PFB at once, in order to have questions answered fully.

The process is somewhat informal, but its main objective is to forward PFB policy and reasoning, and establish and maintain rela-

tionships with the media.

Richard Prether, manager of communications, served to provide introductions of the communications and communications support people.

PFB President Guy Donaldson discussed the issues and answered questions, mostly on his own, but deferring occasionally to staff with more specific issue knowledge.

Also present were legislative issue specialists, introduced by Al Myers, head of the PFB group, and John Bell, counsel for the PFB.

In past years, the state Legislature has more typically been tied up with the state budget and some contentious issues during the last few weeks before the summer recess.

With the end of the state financial year being the end of June, budget issues generally tie up Senate and House debate and business for much of May and June.

This year, the state Legislature in April approved essentially a Gov. Tom Ridge-proposed budget, making it one of the earliest ever budgets. (The governor usually proposes a budget in January.)

While there are many issues of concern continuing to attract the attention of legislators, the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau on Monday focussed on three: water quality; local tax reform; and implementation of the federal Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA).

Donaldson said the implementation of the FQPA was being done in such a way as to threaten the availability of food for the current

world population, much less the anticipated 10 billion people expected through the first quarter of the next century.

"Your just beginning to hear the beginning of this issues," Donaldson said.

The PFB provided reporters with a list of the common names of two families of widely used and accepted pesticides that it considers threatened under the Clinton Administration' Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) interpretations of the FQPA.

Background was provided.

The Delaney Clause was repealed in August 1996 with the passage of the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA).

The Delaney Clause called for zero tolerance of pesticide residues in foods.

In brief, when the Delaney Clause was adopted, testing for residues was not as exact or precise a science as it is today.

It was demonstrated that improved testing techniques have allowed the ability to test for minute amounts of potential pesticide residues (pesticide residues may not necessarily be the pesticide, but chemicals that occur during or after the breakdown of the pesticide).

These minute amounts are very many times more tiny than the amount of pesticide residue that would have passed with testing technologies in effect when the Delaney Clause was created.

In other words, technology made the Delaney Clause obsolete, because being able to detect minute amounts of a chemical

residue does nothing to change the toxicity or biological effect of the residues.

It was argued that the same levels, or less, of pesticide that would have been undetectable during the valid years of the Delaney Clause, have not changed in the amount of health threat, merely in the fact that those small amounts can now be detected.

According to PFB, "All chemicals must meet the new safety provisions of FQPA to be registered for production use.

"Presently, many farm chemicals are being re-registered while new products are seeking registration for the first time.

"FQPA establishes national uniformity for safe residue levels and allows consideration of pesticide benefits to nutrition and the food supply.

"FQPA, also, encourages and streamlines the registration for new, safer crop protection chemicals. This provision will make it profitable to produce crop protection chemicals for small acreage, high-value, minor crops."

While all of this is considered good for agriculture, the Clinton EPA's interpretation of some other aspect of the Act threatens the availability of certain key production chemicals.

According to PFB, "FQPA sets an extra margin of safety for residues on foods consumed in high amounts by infants and children. (FQPA) requires consideration of chemical exposure from sources other than food, such as drinking water and home pesticide use.

"It requires consideration of common mechanisms of toxicity from similar chemicals."

According to the PFB, while that extra margin of safety was a concern when the bill was proposed for passage, the EPA made assurances that the standard would not be used to unnecessarily restrict or cancel safe crop protection products.

But according to the PFB, the EPA is now acting in ways that indicate it may well not follow through with those interpretative assurances.

"Reasonable certainty of no harm" is being interpreted by EPA as essentially the same as zero-risk," according to the PFB statement.

"The extra margin of safety for infants and children triggered denials for the registration of two crop protection products used on cotton.

"Cotton is not a crop food. Chemicals used on cotton do not present a real exposure problem to infants, children or the general public."

The fear is that this will be carried over to deny registration for crop products.

"Some environmentalists and various individuals in government want to cancel two groups of chemicals that are extremely important to agriculture.

"These crop protection chemicals are organophosphates and carbamates."

Donaldson was emphatic in his presentation to the media representatives that this is a serious

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