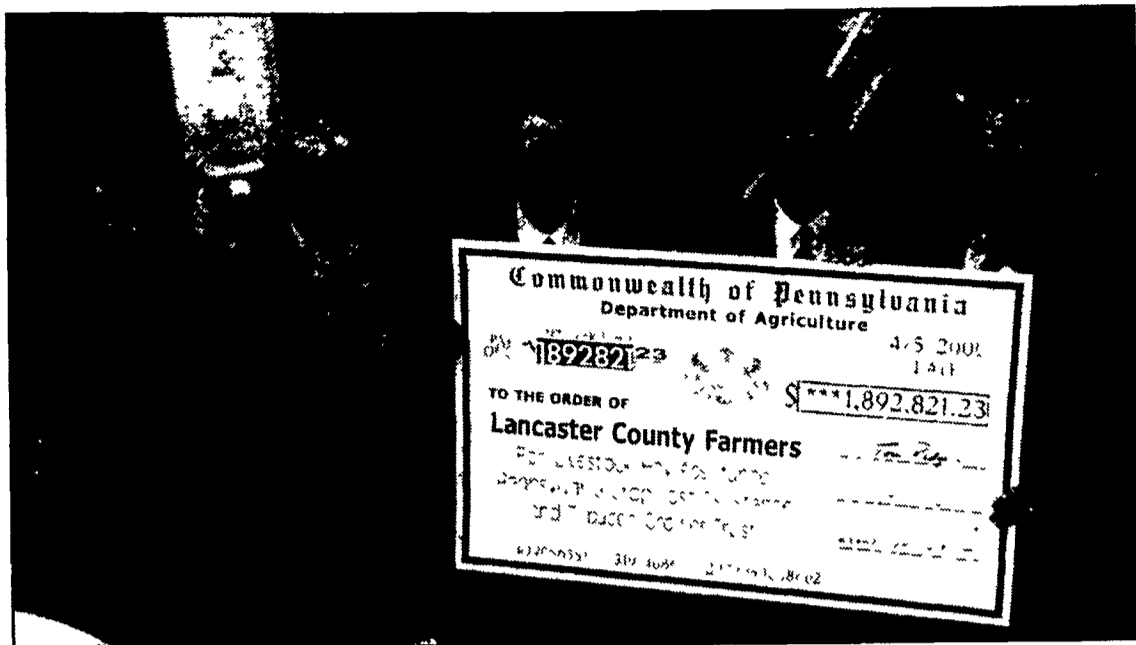


Lancaster County Farmers Receive About \$2 Million For Crop Loss, Other Payments



Total amount paid to farmers in Lancaster County for the drought and other crop losses amounted to \$1,892,821.23, as noted in the "check" provided by legislative work. From left, state Rep. Tom Armstrong, (R-98th); Rep. Leroy Zimmerman (R-99th); Sam Hayes Jr., state secretary of agriculture; Rep. Jere Schuler (R-43rd); and state Sen. Noah Wenger (R-36th). Photo by Andy Andrews

ANDY ANDREWS
Lancaster Farming Staff
NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — Last year's devastating drought combined with this year's debilitatingly low tobacco prices have been eased somewhat by a combination of federal and state financial aid packages.

The total payments made to Lancaster County farmers, as of Wednesday, amounted to about \$2 million, to help offset millions of dollars in crop loss and to help tobacco farmers transition to growing other types of crops.

Additional legislation is proposed to the tune of \$1.7 billion to help farmers in all of Pennsylvania recover from crop disaster, noted Sam Hayes Jr., state secretary of agriculture. The combinations of drought and flooding at the end of the summer were the worst most producers had seen in the state. Last year was "as bad as it's been in 100 years," said Hayes.

Hayes spoke to more than 50 producers, legislators, media, and agri-industry representatives Wednesday at the New Holland Sales Stables.

In announcing the success of the financial aid programs, Hayes outlined how well Pennsylvania — with the help of a full team of legislators — made Pennsylvania greater and quicker to respond to farmers than any other state in the Northeast.

"No other state comes even close," he said.

Last year the state offered many programs targeting the drought, including \$60 million in direct grants and \$5.6 million to subsidize crop insurance. And \$5 million was allocated to provide hay assistance payments to producers.

The average hay assistance payment was \$1,300 per application. About 3,600 producers were eligible.

April 28 is the deadline to send in hay receipts under the statewide rebate program. The first check went out the third week of December, Hayes noted.

For crop loss, the average

payment to the producer has amounted to \$800, a figure, when all state and federal allocations are accounted for, which could rise to about \$4,000 per producer.

State legislators know what is happening in the domestic tobacco market, Hayes noted. Hayes provided an overview of the Tobacco Grower Trust program. The money is not taken from taxpayers. The money is provided by tobacco companies to help farmers transition to another crop. It is not government money. The amount per grower per year, over a 12-year period, is approximately \$5,000.

Out of about 320 eligible, 270 growers are in Lancaster County. The application period is open now through May.

State Sen. Noah Wenger (R-36th) said the money "is not going to . . . make up for all the loss," he said. But it will provide "an expression of support," said Wenger, to help the farmers.

"Farmers are eternal optimists," Wenger said, who believe the next season "will always be better."

The amounts won't stop there. The total in crop loss payments will be more than \$2 million in Lancaster County alone, Ag Secretary Sam Hayes Jr. noted. More work is necessary for another piece of legislation to go through the House and Senate to provide additional help.

State Rep. Jere Schuler (R-43rd) noted that support programs like Pennsylvania's "don't just happen," he said. "Many people are involved."

State Rep. Leroy Zimmerman (R-99th) noted the drought "affected everyone, terribly, in a bad way," he said. "Hopefully this is the last time we'll ever have to do this."

Jane Balmer, Lancaster County Farm Bureau, noted tobacco farmers were thankful "we got anything at all," she said, the way the prices at the auction were this season. Farmers are grateful for the tobacco trust money.

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