

Pennsylvania Grangers Set Policies At State Convention

CARLISLE (Cumberland Co.) — About 325 Pennsylvania State Grange members set new policy on important issues, including prescription and generic drug programs, Food Handler Certification, the importation of dairy cattle from foreign countries, anti-trust and dairy price support programs during the 128th annual convention here.

"As a grass-roots organization, the policies determined here will influence our legislative efforts on Capitol Hill as we work on legislation that will affect agriculture and rural Pennsylvania," Brenda Shambaugh, legislative director, said. "These issues are of greatest concern to our membership, and

the Pennsylvania State Grange will see that these policies are addressed at the state and federal level."

Summaries of the key issues approved by the delegates include:

- Prescription drug programs. The Pennsylvania State Grange supports the recently passed Act 68, which deals with HMOs. Important components of the Act, as adopted by the Grange, include the requirement that a HMO must provide the prescriptions deemed "medically necessary" by the doctor and the right of the doctor to order continued hospitalization without retribution by the hospital or provider.

"Provisions have also been put in place for formally addressing medical care and/or coverage concerns for self or a family member in a prompt, expeditious manner," Shambaugh said. "Many rural Pennsylvanians depend on HMOs for their medical coverage, but in recent months, have been dropped by their carrier. We encourage all Pennsylvanians to become familiar with insurance law and programs."

- Food handler certification. With legislation set to take effect July 2001 requiring all nonprofit organizations selling food to the public to have someone certified in proper food handling techniques, the Grange passed a resolution that seeks to exempt nonprofit groups from paying the cost of training volunteers. "Food safety is an issue of paramount importance to our members," Shambaugh said. "But groups like the Grange, which provide many hours of community service to the public, shouldn't have the added financial burden required by the law to require food handling certifi-

cation. We believe the training program should be provided free to nonprofits so they can continue to provide the type of service they offer to communities across the commonwealth."

- Importation of dairy cattle from foreign countries. The Pennsylvania State Grange is gravely concerned about the importation of cattle from Uruguay and the effect it may have on domestic herds in Pennsylvania.

"It is our concern that all imported livestock, such as the one proposed from Uruguay, may not meet the USDA and Pennsylvania health standards," Shambaugh said. "We believe the Pennsylvania Animal Health

Commission and the Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture should be involved so farmers can be assured that these cattle are certified to meet USDA and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture health regulations before they are imported."

- Anti-trust. Another issue of utmost importance to the membership is anti-trust since farmers have not had the right to bring anti-trust activities against retailers since 1977. Some 23 years later, four meat packers in the U.S. control 81 percent of beef slaughter, 73 percent of

sheep, and 57 percent of pork processing, while four major processors control nearly two-thirds of flour milling. Moreover, dairy mergers are occurring like wildfire and dairies and other well-known brands are now owned by foreign-owned firms.

"In the interest of protecting consumer and farmer interests from the concentration of power that has taken place in the food industry," Shambaugh said, "The Pennsylvania State Grange adopted policy requiring the State and National Granges to work for the repeal of the

court decision that took the anti-trust option away from farmers."

- Dairy price support program. With farm prices at record lows and milk prices at 20-year lows, the Grange modified its policy concerning the dairy price support program which is set to expire on Dec. 31, 2000, Shambaugh said.

"We modified our policy to reflect that of the National Grange," Shambaugh said. "We now support the National Grange's position that seeks a permanent extension of the dairy price support program."

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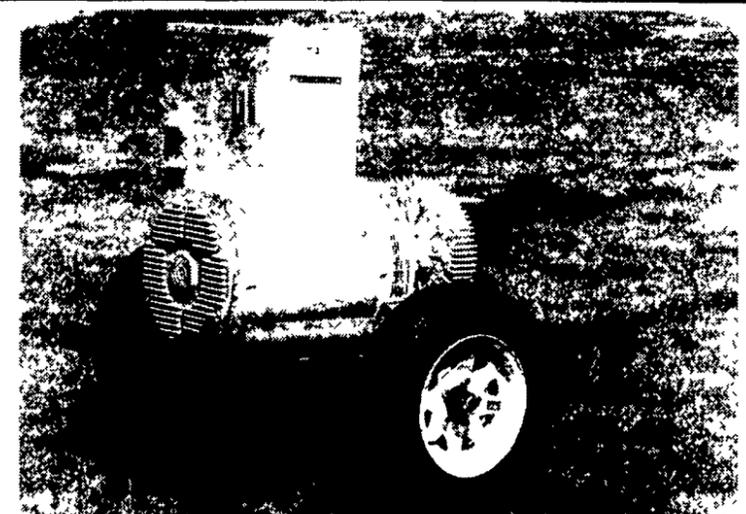
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