

## Farmers Spearheading Local Tax Reform Campaigns

CAMP HILL (Cumberland Co.) — Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is alerting taxpayers around the state that farmers in their area are spearheading local petition signing campaigns aimed at reducing local property taxes.

As of Jan. 1st, residents who have not had a chance to vote on homestead property tax relief in their school district can petition their school board to appoint a special Tax Study Committee to look at the option.

Act 50 of 1998 gave school district two years to take action on their own about investigating whether nuisance taxes could be eliminated and property taxes lowered through an increase in the earned income tax. So far, only five out of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts have put the homestead tax reduction question on local ballots. Property tax relief was approved in three districts.

Farm Bureau believes the property tax is an unfair way to fund school districts and is working for local tax reform throughout the state. Tax burdens should be based on a person's ability to pay. Now, for the first time, taxpayers have the chance to do something about high property taxes through Homestead tax reform.

Under the Homestead legislation, school districts could increase their rate of earned income taxes up to 1.5 percent. The additional revenue would be used to eliminate nuisance taxes such as per capita and occupational taxes, and to lower property taxes through homestead and farmstead exclusions:

The amount of tax relief possible will vary from school district to district. The first step is to get a Tax Study Committee appointed by the school board to look at the possibilities. That's where Farm Bureau's petition

signing campaign comes in.

To mandate the appointment of a Tax Study Committee, registered voters equal in number to at least two percent of the vote turnout in the last gubernatorial election in the school district must sign the petition. Once in place, the Tax Study Committee must examine the numbers to see if enough extra tax receipts could be raised through increases in local earned income taxes to enable local nuisance taxes to be eliminated and property taxes to be reduced. If the Tax Study Committee finds out that Homestead Tax Reform would work and recommends its adoption, the school board must put it before the voters in a referendum. If they refuse, another petition signed by five percent of voters can force the issue on the ballot.

Since Act 50 limits the alternatives for tax reform to adjustments in the earned income tax,

the amount of tax relief possible will vary from school district to school district. If a local Tax Study Committee finds that the Homestead Property Tax relief law would not be effective in bringing about meaningful

property tax reductions, their state legislators need to hear about it. That way lawmakers can be informed of the need to enact further local tax reform measures in the General Assembly.

## USDA Reviewing Tossed Out Ballots In Pork Referendum

ARLINGTON, Va. — USDA officials are reviewing more than 2,000 invalidated ballots in the pork industry checkoff referendum to determine whether to continue the program. The department said it will announce the result of the vote by the first week in January.

According to the American Meat Institute, last October, bal-

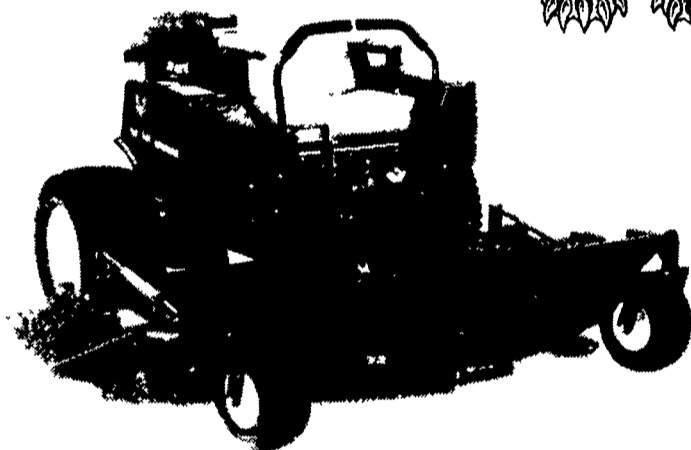
lots were cast on whether to retain the current mandatory checkoff on all market hogs sold. Missing information on registration and certificate forms were the initial reason for invalidating the ballots.

Local Farm Service Agency offices will review the ballots based on new USDA instructions, the department said recently.



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