Lancaster Farming, Saturday, July 13, 2002-A23

Farm Bill Discussed At Ag Issues Forum

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CapitaLink, has been involved in the construction of not only this but also prior Farm Bills. Hebert has noted "the complex interplay between good public policy, politics, and legislative design... it makes for an interesting lawmaking process," he said.

"We went into the Farm Bill with a lot of people calling for very basic, fundamental reforms," he said. "We ended up with a commodity program that didn't change all that much." The net farm income, he said, was not expected to grow significantly during the years of the bill's implementation.

"How did we end up with a Farm Bill that hasn't changed all that much?" he asked. "The feeling is that this was not so broke that it was worth making major reforms."

Payments, he said, are built

into the value of the land, and any proposals to change that system would change land values. "The underlying tendency is not to make major changes, which is too disruptive," he said. "We still have an agricultural system that delivers high-quality products that are affordable and competitive in the marketplace."

Legislation such as farm bills "maintain a solid, stable agricultural system for this country, and this bill will do that," he said.

This year's Farm Bill specialty is the conservation provisions, he said. The "big story," he said, was the more than 10-fold increase on working lands (as opposed to wetlands conservation or long-term land retirement options) conservation.

The \$17 billion slotted for use in conservation programs "is one of the most stunning things that came out of this Farm Bill, in terms of working land conservation," he said.

Producers in Pennsylvania will be able to participate and find helpful the monies available in conservation programs, including producers who have already enacted conservation practices and want to continue them.

Livestock producers will benefit from the money allotted to them in the Environmental Quality Incentives program (EQIP). The program will help producers pay for a comprehensive nutrient management plan, waste management system, soil testing, or implementing soil erosion practices.

EQIP funds are split 60/40 between livestock and crop producers.

However producers wouldn't have gotten the same amount of money if they hadn't gone to representatives and asked for money to be put into the EQIP program, he said.



Participants of Thursday's Agricultural Issues Forum included, from left, regular attenders Luke Brubaker, Brubaker Farms; Jeff Williams, Triple H Construction; keynote speaker Tom Hebert, CapitaLink; Carissa Itle Westrick, environmental consultant; Mike Brubaker, Brubaker consulting; Mark Goodhart, American Agrisurance; and Bill Achor, Wenger's Feed Mill.



