

SB 1413 Expires, Dialogue Continues

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Reintroducing a similar bill in the next legislative session in January might not be the best solution for agribusinesses and producers seeking to operate large-scale facilities in the state, according to Van Blarcom.

"The ag community needs a solution to this problem, and it may not be amending the Right to Farm Act," she said.

In the future, supporters of the bill might decide to approach the issue from a local zoning and comprehensive planning viewpoint rather than introducing another state bill, Van Blarcom said.

SB 1413 expired Nov. 27 after an amended version passed the Senate by a vote of 45-3, but stalled in the House before the session adjourned in the wee hours of Thanksgiving morning. The amended version contained "essentially the same language" as SB 1413, but eliminated references to the Right to Farm Act, Van Blarcom said.

At the heart of the bill was language which would allow farmers to be reimbursed for legal fees when bringing lawsuits against

townships for ordinances ruled illegal in court.

According to Javanna Kopp-Yeakle, PFB communications specialist, a new bill similar to SB 1413 will likely be introduced during next year's legislative session.

"Obviously, this issue isn't going to go away," Kopp-Yeakle said. "We're discussing all that happened during this legislative session. We expect a new bill to be introduced."

Brian Snyder, executive director for the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) and SB 1413 opponent, said one of the main reasons he and other PASA members opposed the bill was because it sought to protect large-scale livestock operations by intimidating township officials. "In our view, the bill was all about intimidation," Snyder said. "Our members are in favor of giving farmers freedom to farm, but are careful of creating rifts. We're not technically against big farms. Our main goal at this point is to promote dialogue that would represent all views of ag."

"One thing everybody would agree on is that we want farmers to have choices," he said.

Snyder pointed out that during the months following SB 1413's introduction, some state representatives learned that not everyone in the ag community was in support of the bill.

"Every representative I talked to over the year said they had no idea that there were farmers in the state who didn't agree with the Farm Bureau's position," he said.

Van Blarcom of PennAg said that SB 1413 supported both small and large farms and would not have taken away local government control.

"There's been a lot of negative and misinformation about SB 1413," Van Blarcom said.

According to Brenda Shambaugh, legislative director for the Pennsylvania State Grange, opportunities in the farming industry have often been limited or prohibited by local governments discriminating against a particular agricultural business.

"The bill was written to help protect our farmers — all farmers," Shambaugh said. "From the small family farm to the larger operators, we must fight to protect our state's most important commodity."

Farmers Eligible For Small Business First Loans

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Agriculture Secretary Sam Hayes announced that for the first time, the Small Business First Loan Program will be available to Pennsylvania farmers to purchase equipment, technology, land, and buildings.

"Our agricultural community must continue to have access to capital in order to compete in today's market," Hayes said. "The Small Business First Loan Program will help stimulate farm enterprises, by providing low-interest loan financing to agriculture."

Loans are available to agricultural production enterprises having 100 or fewer full-time employees. For agricultural enterprises there is no job creation requirement, as for other businesses.

To qualify as an agricultural enterprise, the business must be involved in the management and use of a normal agricultural operation for the production of a farm commodity. Such operations consist of, but are not limited to, the

production, harvesting or preparation for market of poultry, livestock and their products (including bee products); agricultural crops; timber; horticultural crops (including flowers, fruits, vegetables and shrubs); and aquaculture operations (including fish and plants grown in water). The farm enterprise must be at least 10 contiguous acres or, if less than 10 contiguous acres, have anticipated yearly gross income of at least \$10,000.

For more information or to receive an application for assistance, contact the Small Business Financing Division at the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development at (717) 783-5046 or e-mail radcedsbfo@state.pa.us. You may also request information by contacting the Department of Agriculture at (717) 787-6041 or through the PA PowerPort at www.state.pa.us, PA Keyword: "agriculture."

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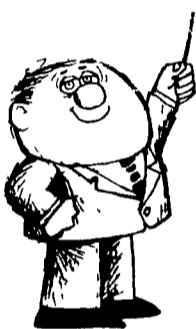
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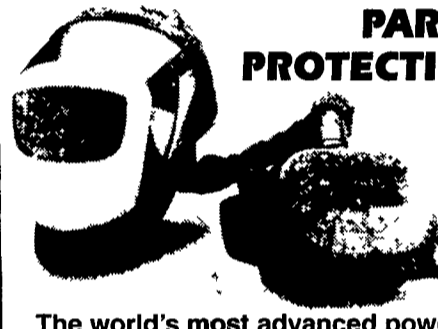
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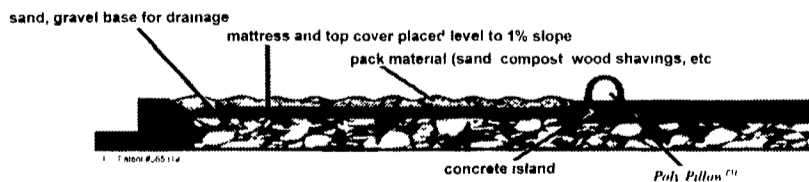
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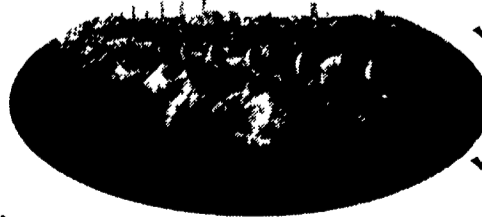
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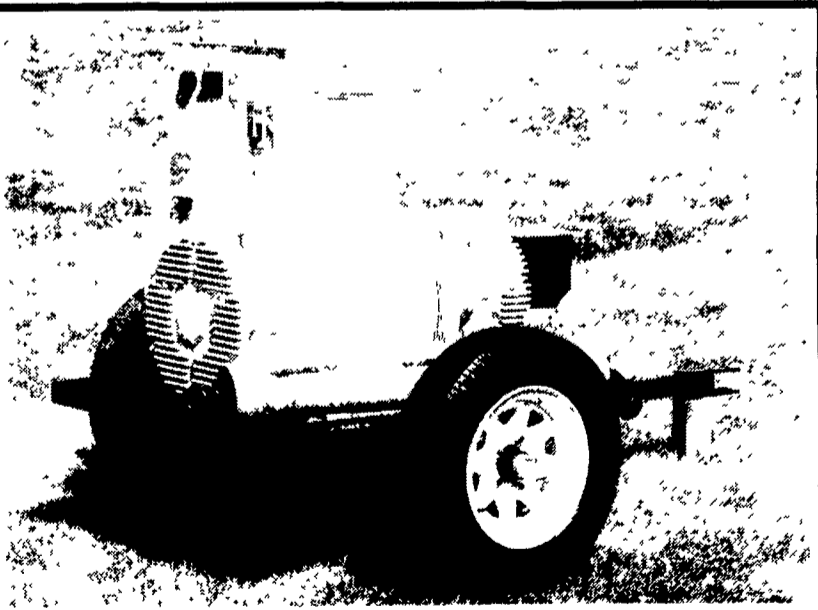
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