

Organizations Gather

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in Pennsylvania is out of control," said Guy Donaldson, president of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. "This problem affects almost everyone, and it will undermine our economy if we don't do something about it. Builders, retailers, manufacturers, food processors, small business owners, and farmers have come together to focus on the problem."

Recent studies on health insurance indicate that Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) are seeking rate increases in 2003 that will average 22 percent. As health insurance rates increase, it causes additional strain on small business owners and farmers to find affordable health insurance coverage for themselves and their employees. Additional studies show rising insurance rates causing employers to consider health plan revisions to compensate for escalating premiums.

Speaking on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Grange, State President Betsy Huber said, "The Pennsylvania State Grange is pleased to participate in this rally today, but we are not pleased that it is necessary. The health insurance crisis is real in our rural areas and especially with our farm families."

Huber also noted that 90 percent of Pennsylvania farm families have one spouse working off the farm, citing health insurance coverage for the farm family as a large reason for this.

However, the problem stretches beyond the farm to include a wider cross section of

Pennsylvania's industries.

"There is a health care crisis in Pennsylvania," said Roger Zimmer, president of the Pennsylvania Builders Association. "Keeping health insurance rates affordable must be a matter of great urgency to the general assembly and the governor."

To address the health insurance concerns rising in Pennsylvania, a concurrent Resolution (H.R. 95) to form the Health Insurance Affordability Commission is pending before the House of Representatives. The panel would be comprised of consumers, legislators, regulators, insurers, and health care providers. Findings and recommendations would be due to the general assembly by the end of the year.

Joining the seven organizations in support of seeking an answer for more affordable health insurance for Pennsylvania were Rep. Nicholas Micozie (R-163), chairman of the Republican House Insurance Committee, and Rep. Anthony DeLuca (D-32), chairman of the Democratic House Insurance Committee, sponsors of HR 95.

Micozie noted that a partisan discussion has begun on how to address the health insurance crisis in Pennsylvania resulting in the introduction of HR 95 and development of working groups to begin the search for possible solutions.

"We need to start immediately to meet with all interest groups to decide a course of action," said Micozie.

In his remarks, DeLuca stress-



Pennsylvania Farm Bureau President Guy Donaldson spoke about the importance of health care insurance reform at the State Capitol in Harrisburg. President Donaldson was joined on the capitol steps by members of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB), Pennsylvania State Grange, PennAg Industries Association, National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), Pennsylvania Builders Association (PBA), Pennsylvania Retailers' Association, and Pennsylvania SMC Business Councils.

ed, "We have a health care crisis and it needs to be addressed. The numbers and statistics speak for themselves. As insurance costs increase, the number of uninsured will continue to increase."

DeLuca also noted that Pennsylvania has more than 2.4 million people uninsured.

Nationally, health insurance annual premiums for family coverage increased an average of 15 percent in 2002, the largest increase in a decade. In Pennsylvania, the average premium has

doubled in 10 years.

As noted at Tuesday's rally, finding a solution for affordable health insurance will take time, but steps are being taken to arrive at the answer.

Like agriculture, members of this informal health insurance al-

liance stressed the importance and need for affordable health benefits.

"Reliable sup-

plies of quality food products and access to affordable health insurance have much in common," said Robert Gueldner, president of PennAg Industries Association. "Both are essential to the people and economy of Pennsylvania."



Participating in Tuesday's rally were organizations representing nearly every sector of Pennsylvania economy. Pictured: Rep. Nicholas Micozie; Betsy Huber, Pennsylvania State Grange; Rep Anthony DeLuca; Guy Donaldson, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau; Kevin Shivers, National Federation of Independent Business; Roger Zimmer, Pennsylvania Builders Association, Brian Rider, Pennsylvania Retailers Association; and Robert Gueldner, PennAg Industries Association

Highlights of the March Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Conference are scheduled for the April 19 Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council's (PFGC's) *Foraging Around* newsletter. Included: PFGC award presentations, conference updates, and news and information.

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