

Chester/Delaware County Farm Bureau Reports Growth

DAVE LEFEVER
Lancaster Farming Staff

BLUE BALL (Lancaster Co.) — The Chester/Delaware County Farm Bureau reported a record number of members this year, along with several hundred new members joining from the western half of Philadelphia County.

President Bob Hewitt said that the group's 1,337 members from Chester and Delaware counties represent "an all-time high." New members from Philadelphia bring the total to 1,689.

Bob Yarnall Jr., vice president, spoke about the cooperation with Philadelphia County to about 100 members at the annual spring banquet Wednesday evening at Shady Maple Smorgasbord.

Yarnall noted that the Philadelphia school system includes the largest FFA chapter in the country at the WB Saul High School Of Agricultural Sciences.

As a Farm Bureau representative, Yarnall met recently with state legislators in Philadelphia.

"They were open to us," Yarnall said of the urban representatives. "It was the first time Farm Bureau really made inroads to speaking with them about the issues."

Yarnall said the Farm Bureau's association with Philadelphia-area lawmakers includes promoting Ag In the Classroom initiatives and urban farm and landscape projects within the city.

Regional Director Ed Buss called the decision to integrate part of Philadelphia into the Chester/Delaware Farm Bureau a "bold move."

Buss also said the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is working to bring a "mobile ag science lab"



David Hodge

into the state to enhance agricultural learning in schools.

Maryland is already using such a lab, referred to by Buss as a "portable classroom" contained in a large travel trailer.

Initial cost of the rolling ag laboratory is between \$30,000 and \$35,000, with annual maintenance costs of about \$30,000, according to Buss.

Buss said that fees collected from Maryland school districts generate nearly enough income to pay for operation of the lab, which is used to help meet new requirements for the Ag In the Classroom Program.

Other reports at the banquet included updates from the local, regional, and state Farm Bureau scene.

David Hodge, apple grower and a county Farm Bureau director, said he participated in a recent legislative trip to Harrisburg to lobby for agricultural concerns with Rep. James Gerlach (R-44).

"The budget is definitely a concern for us," Hodge said. "There's a disproportionate

amount of agriculture to be cut from the proposed (Pennsylvania) budget."

Hodge said the Farm Bureau is asking for permanent removal of the state's "death tax" on inheritances. At this point, the tax is to be phased out in steps, but is scheduled to return in 2010.

The Farm Bureau is also asking state lawmakers to set up a plan to spread tax payments over five years to ease burdens on farmers in years they record a profit, Hodge said.

Reasonably priced medical insurance and stricter regulations on imported milk protein concentrates (MPCs) are other issues being pushed by the Farm Bureau.

Donald "Buster" Needham said he represented the Farm Bureau at an April 1 meeting with Chester County commissioners.

"One of the issues we all have at heart is water," Needham said. "The other is land preservation."

Director Sally Kolb said the tie is strong between the farming community and Chester County officials.

"The cooperation agriculture



Donald "Buster" Needham



Sally Kolb

has had in this county has been phenomenal," she said.

At the state level, Kolb noted that the Farm Bureau is working on a new version of last year's Senate Bill 1413, legislation that was designed to give farmers more leverage in dealing with township regulations. The bill failed to pass in the Pennsylvania House of representatives last fall.

"Hopefully, this year we will have wording that will allow the bill to pass," she said.

Farm Bureau is also seeking property tax reform in the state. That is "by no means a simple problem to solve," Kolb said.

She said the Farm Bureau's hope is that "we will come together on a plan that we can live with a little better than the one we have right now."

Tim Art, a local farm management specialist, urged farmers to

find ways to make the most of risk management opportunities. He gave the example of one local dairy farmer who last fall signed a cheese contract with his milk cooperative and is receiving about \$1 more per hundred-weight over the current price on half of the milk he produces.

Art also told farmers to be aware of an increasing government attention to tax returns.



Bob Yarnall Jr.

"As our clients put it, the IRS is back in the auditing business," he said.

Others on hand at the banquet included state Rep. Art Hershey, whose district includes parts of Chester and Lancaster counties.

Hershey said he was "encouraged" at a recent ag forum in which Dennis Wolff, Pennsylvania secretary of ag designee and Kathleen McGinty, acting secretary of environmental protection, spoke together "about solving nutrient management problems based on science rather than emotion."

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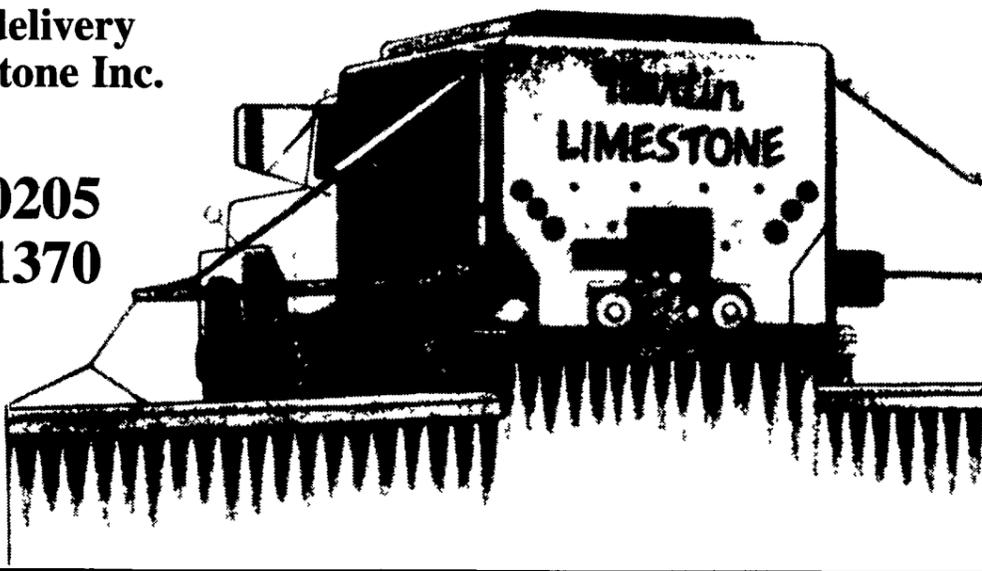
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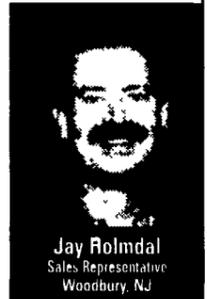
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