

A Plan For Pennsylvania



Dennis Wolff

(Continued from Page A1)

Yet, farmers own 27 percent of the state's land mass. Our current system of funding schools primarily through property taxes means that farmers have been carrying far more than their fair share of the burden.

What makes the current property tax system for school funding even worse is that it isn't fair in how funds are distributed to schools, either. Under our current system, the gap between our wealthiest schools and our poorest schools has widened to more than \$193,000 per classroom. Pennsylvania now ranks 46th among all states when it comes to school funding equity. And, rural schools have consistently been on the short end of the stick. This limits opportunities for our young people to learn the skills they need, it limits new business creation, and it encourages rural youth to leave their communities for better opportunities elsewhere.

Gov. Rendell's Plan for a New Pennsylvania begins with an average 30 percent reduction in property taxes. For farmers, that means an immediate reduction in

their production costs. It means higher net farm income, and welcome relief in these challenging times for commodity prices. The tax relief applies to homesteads and farmsteads, including those enrolled in the "Clean and Green" program.

The governor's plan sends \$1.5 billion in new state funding back to our school districts from a variety of sources to offset local property tax reductions. It brings the state's overall commitment to school funding to a full 50 percent and, for rural school districts, means a 23 percent increase in funding. Rural school districts also will be eligible for salary incentives to help them hire and keep good teachers in math and science.

One of the new revenue sources is a gradual income tax increase, an effort to place the burden of school funding on those best able to pay for it. At the same time, the governor recognizes that many families in Pennsylvania are struggling with unemployment and jobs that don't pay living wages. Many businesses are struggling to keep their doors open. Many farmers have been struggling to be profitable in their farm operations, and have sought off-farm jobs to help make ends meet. Under the governor's plan, the income tax forgiveness program is increased to allow a family of four with an income up to \$32,000 to pay no state income taxes, and other low-income families to have income tax relief.

For as long as I can remember, farmers have talked about Pennsylvania's property tax system with frustration. And, for more than 20 years, state policy makers have looked at other ways to fund local needs. Finally, there is a workable package on the table. Now, it's up to all of us to let our legislators know that this is the time to act.

Lancaster Rotary Sponsors 4-H Strawberry Roundup, Auction



Top 4-H Strawberry exhibitors stand next to the Lancaster Rotary Club member who purchased their winning berries. Front row, from left, Evan Gainer, Kristofer Bucher, Danielle Youndt, and Kenton Bucher. Back row, from left, Sam Altdoerffer, Don Horn, John Groft, and Andrew Appel.

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The Lancaster County 4-H Strawberry Roundup was conducted Wednesday at the Farm and Home Center, Lancaster. A total of 52 4-H members participated. Youth participated in activities including writing thank-you notes, making strawberry milkshakes, and decorating garden aprons while their project books and berries were judged.

Judges who volunteered their time for this year's event included John Sherk (berry judge), Lou Middleton (book judge), Jessica Schmidt (book judge), and

Heidi Gyorke (book judge).

Following the activity and judging, 4-H members and their families joined the Rotary Club for lunch, followed by an auction of the strawberries exhibited. Harold Keller, who has served as auctioneer of this event for more than 30 years, volunteered his services again this year. Rotary members contributed a total of \$1,878.75 toward the 4-H members' projects.

Grand champion and reserve champions were named in two divisions. In Division 2 (youth exhibiting berries for the first time),

Danielle Youndt of Ephrata was named grand champion, receiving \$175 for her quart of berries, and Evan Gainer of Mountville was named reserve champion, receiving a bid of \$90. In Division 3 (youth who have exhibited berries before), Kristofer Bucher of Manheim was named grand champion, receiving \$300 for his winning berries, and his brother, Kenton Bucher, also of Manheim, was named reserve champion, receiving a bid of \$110. First-year members, who exhibited books only, received premium ribbons and a small cash prize.

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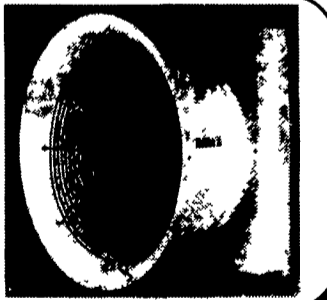
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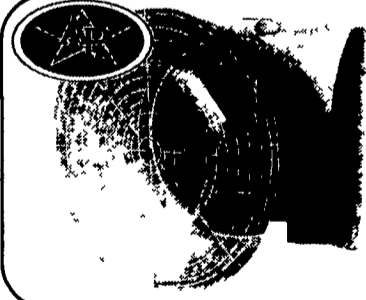
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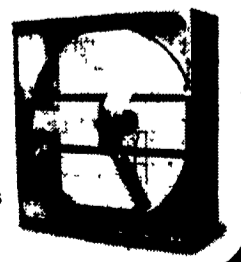


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