

Lawmakers Reverse Decision On Farmland Bill

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ago," said Guy Donaldson, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) president. "If lawmakers can reverse course so quickly on a proposal that breaks longstanding public policy to protect farmland owned by the commonwealth, there's reason for concern about other commitments to farmland preservation."

Donaldson said, "It's passage will likely lead to targeting of more state-owned farmland for development. There's something very contradictory about spending millions to preserve farmland while at the same time giving up prime farmland owned and controlled by the state."

"We are extremely disappointed that the House would reconsider House Bill 66 after it was initially defeated by such a large majority (150-50)," said Brenda

Shambaugh, Pennsylvania State Grange legislative director. "We are most disappointed in those representatives who changed their vote the second time around and supported the bill. This bill could have far-reaching impact on future agricultural land owned by the commonwealth."

One component of the bill is permitting the transfer of agriculture restrictions on the 22 acres to a 46-acre site in Elk Township. Concerns are that if allowed, this bill could impact agricultural land preservation programs, opening the door for agriculture restriction movements.

"The General Assembly just can't appreciate how dangerous this precedent is, and it is precedent setting," said Jayanna Yeakle of PFB. "They just look at it as one farm and one farmer that they are displacing, but it is paving the way for developers to

raid a host of farms and prime farmland."

"The Grange has always been a strong supporter of the agricultural preservation program," said Grange State Master Betsy Huber. "We believe that preserved farmland should remain permanently preserved in order to maintain the integrity of the program. Transferring a covenant would set a dangerous precedent and possibly have a negative effect on future covenants."

An option available to development is a brownfield located to the west of Warren. It is a former manufacturing facility located on Rt. 6 that has been vacant since 1995.

"The Grange certainly supports economic development but feels that the available brownfield would be a much better option for all parties. Shopping centers are not easily converted back to farmland," Huber said.

State Rep. Sheila Miller (R-Berks County) expresses deep concerns on the true potential the impact House Bill 66 places not only on farmland, but all state-owned open space.

The property that was issued the deed restriction is governed by Act 442 of 1967 and Act 159 of 1982. Both acts restrict the conveyance of state owned farmland to be preserved as open space or for farmland.

Miller also notes that Act 442 governs all of state gamelands in addition to the farmland.

She said, "I contend that

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Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

with passage of House Bill 66, we jeopardize more than \$564 million the commonwealth has invested in protecting more than 2,000 farms by throwing doubt on the permanency of any law that is passed to protect farmland and open space when it becomes the target for other land uses."

House Bill 66's passage through the house and pending vote will place Gov. Rendell in conflict with the executive order signed in July 19, where he states, "It is the policy of the commonwealth to protect through the administration of all agency programs and regulations, the commonwealth's 'prime agricultural land' from irreversible conversion to uses that result in its loss as an environmental and essential food and fiber source."

While concerns among agriculture organizations are high, Sen. Noah Wenger (R-Lancaster County) does not believe this will impact our state farmland preservation programs.

"It will have an impact on that particular property," said Wenger, "I don't see it impacting the state (farmland preservation)

program."

Wenger noted, "That was state-owned property, and the easement was placed on it by the legislature. The easement had not been sold — it did not go through the farmland preservation program as we know it."

Wenger said that money generated from the sale of the property in Warren County will go into the state farmland preservation program.

House Bill 66 states that any proceeds from the sale of the farmland received by the state will be credited to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Fund.

House Bill 66 was introduced at the beginning of the implementation of Warren County's comprehensive plan. The plan was developed to generate economic growth for the county.

According to House Bill 66, Warren County is facing several economic challenges, such as an unemployment rate of 19 percent, a decreasing county population, and a high percentage of land owned by state or federal government, which limits the county tax base.

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Southwest Pa. Regional Dairy Day March 11

INDIANA (Indiana Co.) — The Penn State Cooperative Extension of southwest Pennsylvania is again sponsoring a southwest Regional Dairy Day, Thursday, March 11, at the Four Points Sheraton, Greensburg.

This year's featured speakers include Dr. Normand St-Pierre from The Ohio State University and Dr. Karl Nestor, dairy nutritionist for Mycogen Seeds.

St-Pierre's topic is titled "Profile of Successful Dairy Farms" and Nestor's topic is "Evaluating Forage Quality."

The afternoon session will feature four workshops. Producers will have an opportunity to select two workshops. Topics will include continued discussion on "Profile of Successful Dairy Farms," "Evaluating Forage Quality," "Improving Cow Comfort and Movement," and "A Dairy Producer's Experience With Hispanic Labor."

Once again, the planning committee has devel-

oped an educational program that will provide practical information for the dairy producers of southwest Pennsylvania.

For more information, contact Eugene Schurman, extension agent, dairy, (724) 465-3880.

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