



Centre County Farm Bureau *Newsletter*

From the Desk of the President C. Allen Ishler

This has been an incredible fall as far as the weather goes. Many farmers were still baling hay in the middle of November. Corn and soybean harvests are wrapping up with the warm, dry weather.

I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. This is truly a special time of year to give thanks to all the things that are close to our hearts, family and friends. Also, a special thanks to all the men and women serving in the military keeping us safe.

Several Board members of your county Farm Bureau committed the time to represent you at the Pa. Farm Bureau Annual meeting in Hershey. The main thrust of the meeting is to develop the policy that directs the state and national organizations for the upcoming year.

Attending members vote on all of the policies submitted from around the state to make a final decision of the policies to be adopted for the year. As a reminder, during the fall 2015 meeting the membership reviewed and approved policy recommendations that were then forwarded to the Pa. Farm Bureau Annual membership meeting.

If you ever have the time, I encourage you attend the Annual meeting as it brings the complete process from developing policies at our county meetings to voting on them at annual meeting.

Additionally there are a variety of educational programs offered for leadership training. These efforts are designed to better equip the board of directors with programs and projects for our membership.

During the December meeting, the Board will develop the Plan of work for 2016. Many of the project and activities familiar to the Centre County membership will be in place again for the upcoming year.

Membership season is upon us, please remind your neighbors to renew their membership. Many hands will make lighter work to make membership goals.

Other upcoming spring activities include the state and national legislative visits. Mark your calendar early. If you are available to help carry our issues forward to your lawmakers the help will be greatly appreciated. Check the dates to remember in this newsletter to get it on your calendar early.

I encourage you to contact your directors if you have any questions about your Farm Bureau. We are here to help.

I want to wish each and every one a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Until we meet again, Allen

Attempts to Defeat WOTUS Rule Fails in Senate

The effort to send the misguided "Waters of the U.S." rule back to the Environmental Protection Agency failed by a few votes in the U.S. Senate. The Senate was unable to find the 60 votes needed to end debate on a bill and put the measure up for a vote. The Federal Water Quality Protection Act (S. 1140) would have required the EPA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to start over again in crafting new regulations to clarify their authority under the Clean Water Act.

Pennsylvania's two senators were split in their support of the legislation with Sen. Pat Toomey voting in support of the bill while Sen. Bob Casey voted against it. The Senate did conduct a separate vote, passing a non-binding resolution of legislative disapproval over the rule, which was sent to the House for their consideration. The WOTUS rule grants sweeping authority to the federal government over land use decisions. Under the rule, farmers could face the need for federal permits to perform routine tasks on their land.

"While the effort to send the flawed 'Waters of the U.S.' rule back to the drawing board fell a few votes short, we applaud members of the U.S. Senate who today stood up for farmers and ranchers," American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman said. "While we are disappointed in the vote, we know this issue will remain a critical one for America's farmers, and we will continue our fight to protect them from federal regulatory overreach."

A federal judge granted an injunction against the federal government from enforcing the rule, but it is only a temporary victory in the case.

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Farm Bureau Reaches Agreement with DEP, Penn State, On BMP Survey

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau reached an agreement with two state agencies and Penn State University to collect data on unreported best management practices utilized by farmers across the state. As part of the agreement, Penn State will collect data from members through a survey and share the aggregated results with the Department of Environmental Protection. For a number of years, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has argued the federal Environmental Protection Agency has significantly underreported the number of BMPs that farmers are using to reduce the amount of nutrients reaching the Chesapeake Bay

Watershed. A model that the EPA used to develop its Bay cleanup plan only accounted for BMPs that were paid for using federal cost-share dollars, ignoring the voluntary practices farmers have installed on their farms. This data will be used to show the federal government a far-more accurate accounting of best management practices on farms. To date, no survey data exists to quantify the voluntary and non-cost-share BMPs installed on Pennsylvania farms. EPA officials have set targeted reduction guidelines for nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from reaching the Chesapeake Bay, along with specific deadlines for states to reach those goals. PFB is concerned the lack of accurate accounting for BMPs paints an inaccurate picture of agriculture's contributions to water quality concerns within the Bay watershed. The project may require that someone from Penn State, DEP or a local conservation

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district meet with a small number of randomly selected survey participants to verify that survey data reflects what is happening on the farm. PFB encourages all farmers with conservation measures on their farms to participate in this survey.

Property Tax Reform Fails By One Vote

It took the vote of the Lieutenant Governor to defeat a measure that would have provided significant changes to the way schools in Pennsylvania are funded. Lt. Gov. Mike Stack cast a decisive vote to defeat an amendment that would have gradually eliminated property taxes by shifting taxation to an increase in personal income and sales taxes. The amendment was defeated 25-24. Sen. David Argall, who crafted Senate Bill 76, said he and others are not giving up on their quest to eliminate school property taxes. Argall said he wanted to see Pennsylvania move to a fairer system of taxation, one that spreads the responsibility of paying for schools to all taxpayers and not just property owners.

“While this legislation did not gain enough votes to pass the Senate, the problem of ever-rising school property taxes does not go away,” he said. “Each session, we continue to pick up support in all parts of the state and tonight’s tie vote in the Senate shows the importance of this issue.”

Prior to the vote, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau encouraged members of the Senate to vote in favor of shifting school property taxes to other forms of taxation. PFB President Rick Ebert said farmers were disappointed the vote failed in the Senate.

“Farm families across Pennsylvania have long sought a more fair and equitable means of funding school districts across the Commonwealth. We believe the language contained in Senate Bill 76 would have been a better alternative than the existing system,” said PFB President Rick Ebert. “Farmers are deeply concerned that they will continue to bear the burden of escalating school property taxes. Since farmers require a lot of land to produce food, they face hefty school property tax bills.”

While Gov. Tom Wolf has proposed shifting some of the property tax burden to an increase in sales tax, that proposal would only impact homesteads and farmsteads—not farmland. Any property tax reform that does not address taxes on farm land will not help farm families address their concerns, Ebert said.

Transportation Bill Passes House

The U.S. House passed a long-term transportation funding bill that includes language that will give states flexibility to provide exemptions to farm vehicles and drivers traveling intrastate without jeopardizing federal funding. The Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act (STRR Act), was introduced by Rep. Bill Shuster, a Pennsylvania Republican who chairs the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

“A long-term highway bill impacts the life of every single American,” Shuster said. “Our families will have safer roads and our small businesses and communities will thrive with a stronger transportation network. This long-term bill accomplishes something long overdue. It provides our state and local partners the certainty needed to invest in major projects that will spur economic growth.”

A similar bill was approved earlier this year by the Senate. Representatives and Senators serving on a conference committee are working out differences in both bills to create legislation that both chambers could support. If the final bill is approved and signed by President Barack Obama, it would provide a six-year blueprint for highway infrastructure development. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

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worked closely with members of Congress to include provisions in the bill that will give states the ability to adopt their own agriculture exemptions. There was concern at the state level that Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration could have withheld federal highway funds if Pennsylvania adopted standards different than federal requirements.

Happy Holidays from your Centre County PFB Board of Directors!

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DATES TO REMEMBER:

Jan. 5th-7th : Keystone Farm Show
 Jan. 9th-16th : PA Farm Show
 Feb. 2nd : Farm Bureau Day