

Action Requests and Talking Points
State Legislative Conference - April 2007
 PFB Governmental Affairs and Communications Division



State Budget

ACTION REQUEST FOR HOUSE AND SENATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES:

CONTACT HOUSE AND SENATE MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE HOUSE AND SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEES, AND AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEES:

Urge your legislator to support the increases to the following specific budget appropriations line items:

- **A \$2 million increase in the proposed appropriation for financing federal crop insurance premium payments (restoring funding to the FY 2006 – 2007 level with a total appropriation of \$3 million).**
- **A \$1.59 million increase in the proposed appropriation from the Department of Agriculture to conservation districts (restoring \$590,000 and adding \$1 million more for a total line item appropriation of \$2.8 million).**
- **A \$1.72 million increase in funds transferred to the Nutrient Management Fund (enabling a total transfer of \$5 million).**
- **An increase of \$3 million each in proposed appropriations to Penn State University for agricultural research (total ag research appropriation \$28.094 million) and for Extension programs (total Extension appropriation of \$32.787 million).**
- **A restoration in funding for agricultural research under the Department of Agriculture to \$3 million (\$900,000 above the Governor's proposed appropriation).**
- **A restoration of \$500,000 in funding for Ag Excellence Programs such as the Center for Dairy Excellence.**
- **Funding for creation of the Farmer's Market Development Program in the amount of \$250,000.**

TALKING POINTS (State Budget):

- **We believe funding should be restored for several essential agricultural programs, including conservation districts, crop insurance and agriculture research.**
- **Farmers support funding for conservation districts because they provide technical assistance and other information to help farmers develop and implement nutrient management plans. Conservation district workers also help farmers address new environmental regulations. Assistance programs should not be cut at a time when farms face increased regulatory burdens through recent revisions of the state nutrient management, water quality regulations and Pennsylvania's effort to meet its requirement to reduce nutrient and sediment loadings in the Chesapeake Bay.**

(State Budget Talking Points...continued)

- Farm Bureau is seeking additional funding for Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Fund. The fund helps farmers implement nutrient management plans through loans and grants.
- Crop insurance programs, which help farmers supplement premium payments, are always a critical part of risk management, but it's even more crucial this year due to escalating crop insurance costs. If funding is cut by \$2 million as proposed, farmers may under-insure their crops, putting them at a greater risk for loss should a drought or other condition negatively impact a farming operation.
- We support agriculture research because it can help farmers increase productivity and income. Consumers often benefit from increased productivity, because they pay less for their food. Agricultural research also helps prevent and control conditions that threaten the health or well-being of animals and crops.
- The appropriation increases requested to sufficiently fund the programs identified above amount to \$12.96 million above the appropriations recommended by the Governor. In reality, the requested increases amount to only \$9.04 million above the appropriations actually provided for the current fiscal year. This is a modest and prudent investment in the state's largest industry.

Resource Enhancement and Protection Act of Pennsylvania (REAP)

- Urge your legislator to support and work for adoption of legislation contained in House Bill 100 and Senate Bill 690 to provide transferable Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) income tax credits for costs incurred in the development and implementation of agricultural conservation practices on farms, as part of the appropriations actions taken by the General Assembly for FY 2007-2008. PFB is asking the Governor and General Assembly to approve \$25 million in tax credits for FY 07-08 for the REAP program.

TALKING POINTS (REAP)

- Pennsylvania farmers support programs such as the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act of Pennsylvania (REAP), which would help provide incentives for private sector dollars to be invested in agricultural conservation practices.
- PA farmers are true stewards of the land and work hard to undertake measures to reduce any adverse environmental impact on land and water. Some of those measures or remedies are extremely costly and impossible for farmers to pay for by themselves. Programs like REAP help farmers invest in conservation practices.
- More pollution reduction projects on farms, such as forested stream buffers, fencing projects, barnyard improvements and other practices will become a reality if REAP is enacted.
- The flexibility of the REAP program makes it very practical, because many farmers would not benefit from using the state tax credits for their own business. The program allows farmers to sell the tax credits to other businesses, creating a win-win for everybody.

Landowner Liability**(Protection from Liability to Landowners Allowing Others to Hunt on Private Property)****ACTION REQUEST FOR HOUSE AND SENATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES:****Contact House and Senate members, especially those in the House and Senate Game and Fisheries Committees:**

- Express to them the impact that the Lehigh County case has had among landowners in your area not to allow hunting on their property.
- Impress upon your legislator the importance of protecting you from liability when you allow others to hunt or perform other recreational activities on your property.
- Urge your legislator to support and work for prompt passage of amendments to Section 924 of the Game and Wildlife Code to make it clear that landowners who allow others to hunt on their property cannot be legally responsible under this section for any violation of the Code that authorized hunters may commit.
- Ask your legislator to engage House and Senate leadership in promptly passing the legislation contained in House Bill 13 and House Bill 74.

TALKING POINTS (Landowner Liability)

- Farmers and other private property owners should not be held legally responsible for unlawful or negligent actions of hunters just because the landowner allowed the hunter on his land during hunting season.
- Farmers should not fear being held liable for accidents that are beyond their control and caused by the actions of someone else on their property.
- Without adequate landowner liability protection, farmers could literally "lose the farm" if they are found liable for actions of hunters on their property.
- The questionable nature of landowner liability is jeopardizing long-term relationships between farmers and hunters. During the 2006 deer-hunting season, some farmers significantly limited or reduced the number of hunters they allowed on their land due to liability concerns. Some farmers even posted their land for the first time.

Property Tax Reform**ACTION REQUEST FOR HOUSE AND SENATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES:****Contact House and Senate members, particularly those in House and Senate leadership and those on the House and Senate Finance Committees:**

- Express to your legislator in detail how school property taxes burden you and your farm.
- Attempt to get your legislator to commit in making real school property tax reform the number one priority for this legislature.

(Real Property Tax Reform....continued)

- **Stress that tax relief to be provided under property tax reform legislation must include agricultural land.**
- **Inform your legislator that you support measures to achieve relief from school property taxes through increases in state sales tax. (The Governor is proposing a one percent sales tax increase for the State Budget, but only a small portion of it would go for real property tax reform.)**

TALKING POINTS (Property Tax Reform)

- **Farmers are looking for meaningful reform legislation to provide farmers and other property owners in Pennsylvania with true relief from current and future tax burdens, while also providing school districts with a reliable source of revenue to meet reasonable costs of operation.**
- **Pennsylvania farmers support the elimination of property taxes. Farmers support legislation that would expand the state sales tax and create other revenue sources to fund schools.**
- **High property taxes impose serious financial burdens on farm families, because farmers pay a lot more in taxes due to the amount of land that they own. The amount of money a farmer pays for local property taxes is very high relative to the amount of income generated from the farm.**
- **The nature of farming itself does not permit farmers to reduce tax burdens, because farming is a land-intensive enterprise. Ownership and use of large amounts of land are necessary components to the viability of a farm operation.**
- **Pennsylvania farmers pay more than twice the amount of school taxes than manufacturing and other similar industries. Agriculture pays more than 10 percent of the property tax in a school district throughout Pennsylvania, while manufacturing pays 4.6 percent. (Research by Penn State University)**
- **The amount that Pennsylvania farmers pay for property tax as a portion of their total expenses is twice the national average.**
- **Farm Bureau believes elimination of property taxes could help preserve farmland and save family farms, because high property taxes are one of the top reasons farmers sell their land to developers.**

Health Care & Health Insurance Reform

ACTION REQUEST FOR HOUSE AND SENATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES:

Contact House and Senate members, particularly those in House Insurance Committee and Senate Banking & Insurance Committee:

- **Urge your legislator not to support any "reform" initiative that merely shifts the costs of health care to consumers without meaningful reduction in health care costs. Express your view**