Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee
2007 Listening Sessions
Summary of Suggestions, Considerations and Concerns
Senator Mike Brubaker, Chairman

June 26, 2007
ACRE
- (***): Monitor outcome of current cases; consider legislative remedy to technical errors in the ACRE law if the Attorney General is not successful on appeal.
- (*): Consider repealing ACRE legislation to allow local governments to decide what is best for their communities.
- (*): Address concerns in ACRE that give perception of supporting sprawl and superseding local planning.

Bio-Security
- (*): Enact/strengthen legislation to protect producers from animal-activists.

Budget
- (****): Increase funding for local conservation districts.
- (****): Increase funding for PSU Ag Extension and Research.
- (***): Increase funding for the State Food Purchase Program.
- (***): Fund the Farms to Schools program.
- (**): Increase funding for Crop Insurance.
- (**): Expand the Farmers’ Market Food Coupon program, increasing the amount of certificates available and dollar amount of each individual certificate.
- (*): Support the Center for Dairy Excellence.
- (*): Restore funding for the Hardwoods Development Council.
- (*): Increase nutrient management program funding.
- (*): Increase the funding for the PA Preferred program.
- (*): Fund the Dirt and Gravel Road program.
- (*): Preserve fair funding.
- (*): Preserve Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission funding.
- (*): Fund agricultural research.
- (*): Do not automatically increase budget each year; look for programs to cut.
- (*): Adhere to the constitution and provide only those services mandated.

Clean and Green
- (*): Create a category and lower valuation rates for wetlands (currently valued as agriculture use).
- (*): Remove language permitting base acre in agriculture reserve and forest reserve to be valued at fair market.
- (*): Create a category for a “working tree farm;” should not be considered forest reserve.
- (*): Clarify ‘contributory value.’
- (*): Give more authority to the Department of Agriculture for enforcement.
• (*) Limit the ‘ag use’ category to ‘real farmers’ and require a Schedule F as proof.
• (*) Require conservation plans and nutrient management plans for participation.
• (*) Re-define ‘ag use’ as open space and increase the acreage required.
• (*) Automatically enroll preserved land in the program.

**Dog Law**
• (***) Oppose the proposed dog law regulations; the regulatory burden will put the legitimate kennels and small breeders out of business and will not permit the breeding of “working dogs”.

**Economic Opportunity**
• (****) Encourage infrastructure that permits direct marketing for farmers; marketing cooperatives.
• (***) Create processes and funding to assist farmers in developing value-added products (incubator kitchens and Vermont Farm Viability Enhancement Program).
• (***) Create an infrastructure that supports community-based agriculture, encouraging/allowing farmers to meet the demand for locally produced food and increasing the economic, environmental and health benefits within local communities.
• (***) Create healthy agribusiness environment, encouraging job creation which pays for the food, school, roads and all other necessities; support agribusinesses in Pennsylvania to ensure strong infrastructure for farming.
• (*) Give incentives to dining establishments to purchase local foods.
• (*) Assess current participation in community-based agriculture (purchasing of locally produced foods).
• (*) Legalize hemp production.
• (*) Tie food security to keeping local producers in business.
• (*) Encourage more vegetable farming (provide more educational opportunity).
• (*) Encourage schools to purchase local fruits and vegetables.
• (*) Allocate additional funds for feasibility studies under the First Industries Fund.
• (*) Expand the Blue Ribbon Passport Program to include additional geographical areas.
• (*) Coordinate marketing assistance for peach and apple growers in South Central PA.

**Education**
• (****) Support FFA, 4-H and Vocational Agriculture programs to encourage youth interest in agriculture and farming; support programs that encourage the next generation of farming.
• (***) Develop additional educational opportunities/resources for non-agricultural communities about agriculture, from where their food originates, nutrition and issues facing the agricultural communities today; reconnect PA farmers to PA consumers.
• (*** Encourage ag education K-12.
• (*) Encourage urban farming and provide state funding for programs.
• (*) Encourage schools to provide excused absences from school for participation in agricultural fairs.
• (*) Support science-based agricultural education.
• (*) Reform public education system to eliminate inefficiencies and invest in keeping educated students in Pennsylvania.

Energy from Agricultural Sources
• (****) Be cognizant of the affect on the market and on livestock farmers of using corn for fuel.
• (*** Support funding for the development of alternative fuels throughout the Commonwealth.
• (***) Reduce dependence on foreign oil.
• (**) Increase resources for additional research and development for alternative energies to prevent competition between food and fuel.
• (**) Support the Governor’s Energy Initiatives.
• (**) Develop a program that provides grants to farms and businesses that choose sustainable energy sources; assist farmers in project start up and capital investment.
• (*) Develop a capital investment program to allocate capital funds for solar and wind generators for farmers with repayment based on the percentage saved by using the alternative energy.
• (*) Encourage infrastructure for waste to energy systems.
• (*) Be cognizant of the affect of removal of electric rate caps in 2009.
• (*) Reduce bureaucracy involved in utilizing agricultural waste materials to ensure they’re considered a resource.
• (*) Consider funding/research for non-conventional alternative energies such as boilers fueled by non-recyclable plastics.
• (*) Do not let the NIMBYs control the placement of production facilities.
• (*) Support the establishment of publicly accessible biofuels dispensing facilities.
• (*) Support state and Federal mandates for the use of alternative fuels by motor carriers.
• (*) Do not support mandates for the use of alternative fuels by motor carriers.
• (*) Support financial incentives for the use of alternative fuels.
• (*) Support the local production of alternative fuels; link alternative energy production with the surrounding community, locating close to the source of fuel.
• (*) Ensure implementation of net metering in Pennsylvania.
• (*) Use “wasted space” to collect solar and wind energy.

Environment/Conservation
• (****) Support REAP; provide incentives to farmers who protect the environment.
• (*** Support LBFC suggested changes to Act 217 (Conservation Districts); support Wonderling amendments to Act 217.
• (***) Ensure all are held responsible for nutrient reduction to the Chesapeake, not just farmers.
• (**) Provide additional funding for nutrient management plan writing and implementation; farmers cannot afford to match the cost share and plan writers are not available equally across the state.
• (**) Provide additional time to meet the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy reduction goals.
• (**) Encourage composting systems.
• (**) Protect our soils.
• (*) Reduce the frequency needed for nutrient management plan review to cut cost to the farmer.
• (*) Break down barriers between production ag and Environmental organizations.
• (*) Consider changes to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to ensure farmers are not priced out of the market for renting land.
• (*) Require maintenance on stream bank fencing projects funded by the state; tree tubes are not being maintained and tax dollars are being wasted.
• (*) Educate general public on strides farmers have made in conservation.
• (*) Allow fines for environmental violations to be used to fund conservation districts.
• (*) Develop additional education programs and financing for general public and farmers on use of biosolids to prevent conflict in communities (program did exist in DEP but is no longer funded).
• (*) Increase tipping fees and use this as a source of funding for conservation districts.
• (*) Ensure equity across the state for conservation funding; most goes to Chesapeake Bay watershed, which does not cover the whole state.
• (*) Allow on-lot septic systems.
• (*) Consider storm water management.
• (*) Revisit the “toxics of concern” list under the Chesapeake Bay Commission.
• (*) Provide a sustainable environment for wildlife.
• (*) Consider legacy sediments in the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy.

Farmers’ Markets
• (**) Support Farmers Market Development Program to improve urban access to affordable and nutritious foods, and provide additional markets for farmers.
• (**) Support farmers markets’ as a means of marketing for small farmers.

Farmland Preservation
• (****) Provide additional funding for easement purchase on the state, county and local levels; establish a dedicated funding source for farmland preservation.
• (****) Restrict development; stop sprawl.
• (**) Evaluate and report strengths and weaknesses of current program; evaluate whether or not preservation keeps farms affordable for future generations and whether funding is being used in best possible manner.
• (**) Set cap on cost of per-acre easement purchase; do not purchase land that is exorbitantly expensive; preserve land in less expensive areas of the state.
• (*) Permit preservation of only lands part of a viable agriculture system.
• (*) Support an option for counties to raise their realty transfer tax by 1% for farmland preservation.
• (*) Remove the 25 year clause from the Ag Area Security Law
• (*) Allow subdivision of preserved land to create small farms.
• (*) Allow more flexibility in the program to farm as the farmer sees fit.
• (*) Review funding formula, particularly the weighting of transfer tax revenues, for fairness.
• (*) Allowing county commissioners to determine local monies to be dedicated to the farmland preservation program gives them too much power.
• (*) Provide tax benefits and exemptions for preserved farms.
• (*) Make state-owned land available for development to take the pressure off of farmland.

Federal
• (****) Convey support to Federal legislators for Immigration policies that permit immigrant labor for agricultural businesses.
• (***) Ensure equitability for the Northeast in Federal Farm Bill.
• (***) Support the National Animal Identification System.
• (***) Oppose the National Animal Identification System; exempt small farmer.
• (*) Work for better coordination of services between the State and Federal Government.
• (*) Ensure strong nutrition title in the Federal Farm Bill.
• (*) Prohibit the importation of cheap, lower-quality agricultural commodities from other countries.
• (*) Support country of origin labeling.

Finance and Access to Capital
• (***) Provide additional capital for start up farmers.
• (*) Appropriate more funds for grant programs as opposed to loan programs.
• (*) Support legislation providing access for the Farm Credit Institutions to the First Industry Fund guarantee programs; farmers would like to use their services but are having to shop elsewhere to access this service.
• (*) Continue and increase funding for programs such as the Small Business First and Machinery and Equipment Loan Fund to assist farmers in financing new and expanded ventures.
• (*) Provide additional access to financing for farmers as farm indebtedness is preventing investment.

Food Insecurity and Nutrition
• (****) Improve affordability and availability of fresh, locally-grown nutritious food for the economically disadvantaged.
• (***) Improve nutrition in schools; continue funding and subsidies for nutritional education and school lunch/breakfast programs; prohibit carbonated beverages in schools; provide more nutritious foods to schools.
• (***) Support HB550 to give farmers tools to manage deer damage problems.
• (***) Support the Game Commission’s current policy on deer control; the deer herd is out of control and deplete the next year’s seedlings through browsing.
• (***) No to Sunday hunting.
• (*) Support John First for Game Commission.
• (*) Fund the erection of deer fences to prevent deer damage to crops and forest regeneration.
• (*) Support elk fencing legislation.

Honey Bees
• (***) Provide funding for research into the Colony Collapse Disorder; much of Pennsylvania agriculture relies on pollination by these vectors and their demise will have a negative impact on crop production.
• (*) Provide better educated inspectors.
• (*) Encourage better communication between farmers and bee owners to ensure bees are not inadvertently exposed to toxins.
• (*) Prevent local governments from determining where honey bees can be kept.

Insurance
• (****) Control health care costs as they are out of control (excess of 50% of net income in numerous cases).
- (***) Protect landowner liability through SB735, HB13 and HB74, which would clarify liability for landowners who allow individuals to use their land for recreational purposes.
- (*) Improve access to general liability insurance.
- (*) Utilize insurance company surpluses to stabilize costs of health insurance.
- (*) Reduce the price of crop insurance; too expensive for the average farmer.
- (*) Change the process of purchasing crop insurance – must purchase it before knowing what the price will be.
- (*) Encourage more agencies to get involved with crop insurance – not much choice amongst crop insurance agencies currently.
- (*) Improve dissemination of information about available health care programs to rural/agricultural communities.
- (*) Support new insurance programs (milk revenue program and grazing, pasture and hay land protection) being proposed by the Secretary of Agriculture.

**Livestock Farming**

- **Beef**
  - (*) Prevent the manipulation of the market by buyers.

- **Dairy**
  - Develop policy to assist the dairy farmer through their current crisis; many farmers have seen losses due to increased costs of fuel, feed and other inputs, while prices received are at an all-time low. Suggestions:
    - (***) Allow broader processing of raw milk products; help raw milk farmers conform to the law.
    - (**) Review the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board's policies to expand the over-order premium to all dairy farmers in the state.
    - (**) Work with the federal government to make the milk pricing system reflect the cost of production.
    - (**) Immediately impose an assessment on milk and milk products at the retail level to be distributed directly back to the farmer (not to the cooperative).
    - (**) Develop policy that will return a fair market value to the farmer for milk.
    - (**) Provide direct emergency payment to dairy farmers like New York, Vermont and Maine.
    - (**) Support the Milk Marketing Board.
    - (*) Eliminate the Milk Marketing Board.
    - (*) Regulate milk cooperatives.
    - (*) Support the MILC program.
    - (*) Dismantle the MILC program.
    - (*) Align dairy pricing with real market.
    - (*) Do not enact Pooling.
    - (*) Enact policy to assess processors with hauling costs instead of farmers.

- **Sheep / Goats**
• (*) Develop more effective protection programs from predators for the sheep industry (support the Livestock Protection Program proposals by PDA).
• (*) Increase reimbursement for loss of livestock; currently provided through the Department of Agriculture’s Dog Law Restricted Account and is depleted quickly each year.
• (*) Reimbursement program should be run through the Game Commission.

• ** Equine
• (*) Permit access to state game lands for horse back riders
• (*) Adopt legislation giving horseback riders rights on roadways (similar to New Jersey law).
• ** Swine
• (*) Industry underserved by the state.

• ** General
• (**) Support premises identification.
• (**) Address shortage of large animal veterinarians in the state by supporting the vet technician program, increasing student loan forgiveness and ‘saving’ the small farm so that there is a pool of qualified candidates from which to choose.
• (**) Exempt small farmer from processing/butchering regulations.
• (**) Oppose concentrated farms.
• (*) Processing Facilities – keep critical mass in PA (both conventional and unconventional).
• (*) Fund research to address odor concerns.
• (*) Oppose premises identification.
• (*) Control use of antibiotics in animal agriculture.

**Miscellaneous**
• (**) Research GMO’s to ensure safe for human consumption; oppose GMO’s.
• (**) Prohibit eminent domain abuse.
• (*) Adopt tort reform.
• (*) Increase food safety awareness on farm, processor and consumer levels.
• (*) Mandate respect by coal bed methane drilling industry of surface owners’ rights.
• (*) Eliminate inequities of inspections between permanent facilities and open air/farmers’ markets.
• (*) Oppose the creation of a Farm Show Authority.
• (*) Adopt bottle bill.
• (*) Need for improved access to technology; high speed internet/broadband not available in many rural areas.
• (*) Adopt a state-wide ban on burning non-vegetative matter.
• (*) Expand the noxious weed law; more species and more control.
• (*) Control mining.
Organic/Sustainable/Alternative Agriculture

- (****) Support infrastructure that is organic/sustainable/small farmer friendly; provide funding to promote organic/sustainable agriculture; educate conventional farmers about organic/sustainable agriculture.
- (**) Provide funding for local fresh food campaigns.
- (*) Create process to monitor and curb spray drift.
- (*) Allow for “grass-fed” labeling.
- (*) Assist in creating access to the market for organic farmers.
- (*) Waive restrictions/regulations to purchasing agricultural products directly from farmers.

Regulation

- (****) Streamline and increase the consistency of regulation enforcement/permit process across Pennsylvania; copious and unpredictable regulation enforcement delay production and increase the cost of doing business for producers and agribusinesses.
- (****) No new regulations; no unfunded regulations.
- (*) Consider designating the Department of Agriculture as the lead agency for farm permitting processes rather than the Department of Environmental Protection.
- (*) Simplify regulations for ease of compliance by the lay-person.
- (*) Designate an individual or bureau to assist the regulated community in understanding their responsibilities.
- (*) Create incentives to encourage agribusinesses to locate in Pennsylvania as opposed to causing them to look out-of-state.
- (*) Share cost of Chesapeake Bay cleanup amongst all; not just farmers.

Size Matters

- (**) Support education for all that we need big and small sized farms and everything in between; support ag ombudsman to mediate conflicts.
- (**) Ensure the smaller farmer is considered in policy decisions and for subsidies.
- (*) Promote understanding that the choice is at the consumer level.

State/Local Government

- (****) Support local government planning, smart growth and strong urban centers to stop sprawl.
- (*) Represent the electorate as promised in elections; make tough but educated decisions in the best interest of Pennsylvania.
- (*) Restructure local government system to promote uniformity in regulatory, policy, commerce and land use issues (among others) across Pennsylvania; support state spending and planning in support of these clearly defined goals.
- (*) Abolish municipal governments and go with county governance system.
- (*) Enlarge local government budgets
- (*) Pay legislators commensurately with industry.
- (*) Reduce the number of legislators
- (*) Change terms for Representatives to four years.
- (*) Encourage legislators to participate in conferences to share information and experiences.
- (*) Strengthen local government ability to write ordinances preventing factory farming.

**Taxes**
- (***) Equalize tax burden between landowners and non-landowners; property tax reform; eliminate property taxes for farmers and base on income alone.
- (*) Eliminate “death tax” (inheritance tax).
- (*) Exempt farmers from the tax on lawyers’ fees.
- (*) Establish impact fees on development to fund schools.
- (*) Replace property tax with sales tax on non-farm products.

**Timber Industry**
- (**) Develop educational tools on forestry industry issues for municipal officials in Pennsylvania; local governments are preventing timber harvesting through ordinance.
- (**) End the policy of not permitting state dollars to be used to control native insects like forest tent caterpillar.
- (*) Develop educational materials for forest owners about forest management.
- (*) Provide funds to control non-native insect infestations as there are no natural controls.
- (*) Protect the Sugar Maple.
- (*) Provide funding specifically in Extension budget for a maple specialist; currently relying on Ohio and New York expertise.
- (*) Promote wood energy in Pennsylvania.
- (*) Develop program similar to farmland preservation for working forest land (like the Federal Forest Legacy Program).

**Tobacco**
- (**) No new taxes on tobacco; new taxes will drive production to other states costing farmers income and the state revenue.

**Transportation**
- (**) Increase width restrictions on machinery and equipment (HB 1076) and remove width limitations for dusk to dawn on the road.
- (**) Support funding for additional rail systems to transport products from rural to urban areas.
- (*) Improve dirt and gravel road management.
- (*) Educate general public about safety around farm equipment on the road.
- (*) Need additional funds for road & bridge maintenance and new infrastructure to support rural transportation.
General Quotations

- “When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers therefore are the founders of human civilization.”
- “Comon Sence, Comon Sence, Comon Sence, Comon Sence, Comon Sence” [sic]
- “Support radical, peculiar thinking farmers.”
- “Do you know the lyrics to “Thrasher” by Neil Young?”
- “Read Omnivore’s Dilemma.”
- “Freedom of food choices!”
- “Treat food as a resource and protect it as such.”