

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

June 26, 2007

<b>Key</b>	* = 1-2 comments received
	** = 3-5 comments received
	*** = 6-10 comments received
	**** = 10+ comments received

### **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.

- (\*\*) Increase proliferation of nutrition education, particularly for economically disadvantaged and urban communities; involve caregivers and provide for life-long learning.
- (\*\*) Address weight management and obesity at all ages; provide community centers and after school programs for weight management education but be cognizant of competing against private businesses.
- (\*) Support relationship-building between farmers, markets/stores and consumers to encourage increased food self-reliance in urban areas.
- (\*) Increase resources for distribution and storage of food for food bank organizations.
- (\*) Consider consequences for the dairy industry of a ban on trans fats that do not distinguish between “good” and “bad” fats.
- (\*) Create a program on the state level (one exists on the Federal level but is sunsetting) that provides tax relief to farmers who donate food to local food banks.
- (\*) Support the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, which would provide apples and other fruits and vegetables that do not meet processor requirements to food banks for distribution to needy families.
- (\*) Support “Weekender Program”: sending food home in gym bags with “free lunch” students to encourage nutritious meals on weekends.

### **Game Commission**

- (\*\*\*) 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.”