



## FARMERS FIRST AGENDA HELPS TO PROMOTE PA AGRICULTURE

Last year, I joined my colleagues in the Senate to introduce a comprehensive package of legislation to benefit our agriculture community.

The Farmers First Agenda included a number of measures to protect and preserve Pennsylvania's number one industry and we enjoyed a great deal of success in moving these bills through the General Assembly to ensure that the farming industry remains strong in Pennsylvania.

One piece of legislation, Senate Bill 723, improves our already successful farmland preservation program by authorizing private, non-profit organizations to jointly purchase agricultural conservation easements with governments. In addition to promoting the farmland preservation efforts that are crucial to the vitality of the agriculture industry, the General Assembly also approved legislation that would extend the farmland preservation program to include equine activity, as well as a new law to limit equine liability.

A new law will reduce the inheritance tax on farmland by valuing the transfer of land that is part of an agricultural conservation easement at 50 percent of the easement for inheritance tax purposes.

This will provide farm owners with another incentive to take part in the Commonwealth's farmland preservation program and ensure that farmland passed down from generation to generation is not subject to a burdensome inheritance tax.

In the first year of our Farmers First Initiative, we made major strides to protect valuable farmland, promote the state's number one industry and ensure that farming remains strong in Pennsylvania.

I'm pleased that we are funding new programs to promote agriculture and keep good jobs here in the Commonwealth.



*Senator Corman purchased the Grand Champion market lamb at the Mifflin County Youth Fair. The lamb was raised by Branson Harpster.*

### SECOND PHASE OF FARMERS FIRST ANNOUNCED

Due to the success of the Farmers First Agenda legislative package, we are moving forward on a second phase of agriculture bills. Several of these initiatives have already cleared the General Assembly and been signed into law.

Act 110 will create a dedicated fund for our state's conservation districts. Our conservation districts play a vital role in helping land owners use best management practices, as well as administering the state's Nutrient Management law and coordinating watershed activities. By providing a single, dedicated funding source for our conservation districts, we can reduce their accounting and reporting burdens and allow them to focus their energies on helping our farm owners and protecting our environment.

Other legislation we are considering would include:

- Creating "The Centers for Agriculture Excellence and Education" to serve as a central clearing house of programs and information for current and new farmers.
- Combined funding for conservation districts through a fund administered by the State Conservation Commission.
- Legislation to ensure the continuation of vocational agriculture and FFA programs operated by school districts and area vocational-technical schools.
- Funding to implement alternatives that would provide for water releases during low-flow periods without having to impose consumptive use fees on farmers.

## CORMAN BILL WOULD ENCOURAGE FARMLAND PRESERVATION

The Senate is currently considering a bill sponsored, Senate Bill 1107, which is intended to encourage farmland preservation by changing the way state funding is distributed.

Under current law, farmland preservation dollars are distributed through two formulas. Money is first distributed through a grant program to eligible counties. The remainder of the money is distributed based on a county's matching funds. This money is then used to purchase an easement

In many counties this only allows for a handful of farms to be preserved, leaving the rest either to wait for additional funding or become the target for development. In some communities, farmers and estates are willing to donate their land to their county ensuring preservation. Senate Bill 1107 rewards this environmental stewardship and preservation commitment.

When counties are able to preserve donated land, this frees up their resources to preserve other area farms. In the cases

were farmland is purely donated to the county, Senate Bill 1107 would allow counties to use half of the land's value in lieu of money in the county-state match part of the formula.

For instance, if a \$500,000 farm is donated, the county would be able to claim \$250,000 in addition to the traditional money allocated for the formula. Having additional money in the beginning allows them to leverage additional state dollars for farmland preservation.

### 2006-07 AGRICULTURE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

- Includes an additional \$1.4 million for the Animal Health Commission.
- Triples the appropriation for the Crop Insurance Program to \$3 million.
- Restores \$900,000 in funding for Agriculture Research.
- Includes an additional \$250,000 for Agriculture Promotion, Education and Exports.
- Increases Agricultural Research and Agricultural Extension Services through Penn State University by \$2 million each.
- Provides \$6.1 million for an Agricultural Consumptive Water Use Project in connection with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission.
- Restores \$500,000 in funding for Plum Pox eradication.
- Includes an additional \$16,000 for Future Farmers.

### SENATE APPROVES LEGISLATION TO CREATE "HEALTHY FARMS AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE"

recently voted for legislation that would establish a "Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools Initiative" to bring locally grown agricultural products into Pennsylvania classrooms.

Senate Bill 1209 is aimed at providing young school-aged children in Pennsylvania with locally grown fresh food and snacks and teachers with nutrition and agriculture educational resources.

The Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools Initiative not only helps to promote the state's agricultural industry but also aids young children in developing good eating habits.

Diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure are on the rise as a result of an obesity epidemic, and an alarming number of children are overweight. We need to help children

to choose nutritious foods over those which are high in fat, sugar and salt. The Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools Initiative incorporates a comprehensive approach to educating young children about healthy food and the value of supporting local farms.

It is my hope that this program is successful not only in educating young children about nutrition, but also in helping to stimulate dialogue about the dangers of childhood obesity.



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