

## **Testimony of PennAg Industries Association**

### **Farmers First Agenda Informational Hearing**

**October 17, 2005**

Good afternoon. My name is Rene Lavoie. I am General Manager of Cumberland Valley Cooperative in Shippensburg. I am here today as President of Pennag Industries Association, which represents 650 agribusinesses that support and serve our Commonwealth's farmers and producers.

I would like to begin by thanking the Chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs committee, Senator Waugh, for the opportunity to make comments at today's hearing. We are extremely pleased that Senator Waugh and his colleague Senator Wenger, introduced their Farmers First Agenda this past June, and appreciate the opportunity to remark on the package.

In recent months, the Pennsylvania legislature has been actively addressing many of the needs of the agriculture community. Their goal has been to make sure that agriculture, an industry valued at over 45 billion dollars, can remain viable here in the Commonwealth.

The passage of Act 38 is an excellent example of the fine work of the General Assembly this year. Act 38 may be the most significant piece of agriculture legislation to be

passed in many years. It will allow agriculture to modernize and grow in Pennsylvania, while at the same time, protecting the water and air that is necessary for all citizens.

I only mention Act 38 because I believe that the success of the Farmers First Agenda is directly tied to it. Without the foresight and leadership of the legislature in passing this Act, Agriculture in this state would be in trouble.

Today I will speak about two of the eight important components of the Farmers First Agenda. First I'd like to address the alternative uses of manure issue.

There are several factors that we would like the committee to consider when considering legislation dealing with manure. First we must recognize that a majority of farmers within the Commonwealth currently do an exceptional job of meeting the nutrient management laws and regulations. It is also important that we adopt a new perception regarding manure. Manure should not be seen as a problem, rather an important nutrient resource for crop producers in the Commonwealth. Because much of the state's animal production is concentrated in the southeastern region, sensibly, that same area also has a high concentration of manure. There in lays the challenge – accepting that Pennsylvania does not have too much manure, rather it has a manure distribution problem.

By implementing alternative uses, the manure distribution issue can be alleviated since less surface area will be devoted to land application. As we are discussing alternative

manure uses, we must continue to keep in mind that the end result has to be reduction in the nutrient content of the manure. Some processes eliminate all nutrient value in the end product, whereas others retain a nutrient byproduct that leaves us with a need for land application. It is unreasonable to eliminate all land use of manure since some nutrients are necessary for proper crop production.

In an environment that is witnessing increases in oil and natural gas costs, we need to explore any and all alternatives that would use manure as an energy source such as electricity, steam and gasification. Energy consumers need to be assured that manure is a reliable, domestic and abundant component of energy production. Many forms of renewable energy are already making great advancements. PennAg is actively participating in this effort via a grant awarded by DEP that will study the burning of poultry litter for energy.

Composting and fertilizer production from manure are additional examples of alternative uses currently in practice. Although effective, these practices are typically done on a smaller scale for niche markets. In order to effectively increase the impact of these uses, markets and demands would need to be increased significantly.

Funding and logistics are vital components of the implementation and success of alternative uses for manure. In order to implement these technological advancements, producers, farmers and agribusiness will need financial support. One way this can be done is through an increased availability to the agriculture industry of agency grant

programs, such as DEP's Energy Harvest Grant. Logistics and placement of these uses will also play a role in financial feasibility. On farm implementation, although presently successful in some cases, may not be a viable option for every farmer and producer in the Commonwealth. We must also consider the development of centralized efforts, where many stakeholders could participate.

An overwhelming number of groups are discussing manure management alternatives, including private organizations and at the local, county, state, and federal government levels. We need to make sure we are not duplicating efforts. Rather we need to have cooperative efforts to make sure practices are successfully implemented. I can not stress enough that achievement is becoming more and more financially difficult with these added demands, for example the Manure Hauler/Broker Certification program serves as a strong example. The agriculture community can not be expected to implement advanced technology without support. You can understand the industry's frustration when increasing demands are made, however little effort is made to offer the financial assistance for compliance.

Finding a workable solution to any long term manure management strategy does not have one straight forward solution. When creating alternative uses and markets for manure, consideration of secondary issues, such as transportation, economic feasibility, elimination of nutrients and redistribution must occur. Decisions and solutions must have a systematic approach and consider all parties, including agencies, policy makers

and industry. Each party has significant contributions and authority should be equally appointed.

I would also like to briefly comment on the school nutrition component of the Farmers First Agenda.

Childhood nutrition is a challenge that pertains to all of us in various capacities.

PennAg applauds Senators Waugh and Wenger for their recognition of this through the “Farm to schools” program. This effort not only improves the health of our youth, but provides an additional market for local producers and helps bridge the ever-widening gap between the farm and the consumer.

Many thanks for the opportunity to address these important issues. PennAg looks forward to assisting you in the success of this initiative.

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