

Challenges facing Pennsylvania agriculture
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First of all I want to commend the senators for their initiative to identify what I will call the “eight critical position papers” (Farmers First Agenda). These are the main opportunities to be addressed in order to drive Pennsylvania’s Agriculture’s viability for long term sustainability.

The continued escalating labor cost and the need for profitability keeps the Mason Dixon Farms team open to new technology for the most efficient means of production for today as well as for our future generations. We have found a team–management–business–plan approach best implements the synergistic holistic environmental friendly sustainable system most sought after in today’s world.

The key to keeping the farmer in business is to have a system that encourages the adoption of new technology. The challenge is to have the visionary plan. The one–family general farms need to converge into a hybrid–focused mentality where complimentary passions drive low–cost production implementing new ideas for efficient food and energy production. A well–oiled plan will catch the eye of many investors, overcoming the oft expressed question: “but who is going to pay for it?” The answer is the consumer who wants quick–stop shopping, getting the most farm fresh, great tasting, healthful food that guarantees that Britney Spears vitality and vigor. The “we can do it” attitude will drive a Pennsylvania long–term responsible future. This belief system needs to be learned. The people who say “it can’t

be done” will be absolutely right – if we believe them. If we don’t believe them, a new tomorrow can become a reality.

We need to look at all aspects of the educational system to teach young people, by example, individual responsibility for healthful living by only making healthy foods available to our school age children; eliminating the temptation for junk food.

The higher educational system has to raise awareness of the emerging cutting edge technology which provides opportunities for energy production from renewable sources.

Mason Dixon Farms believes in remaining farm friendly to the environment as well as the neighborhood. We were one of the first to have a CAFO approved nutrient plan. In 1946 we saw the need to preserve the agricultural land around the home farm. This effort has grown by about 35 other land owners offering to sell us their farm in order to keep it in farmland. Our immediate farm community now comprises about 6000 acres in a block preserved for future generations. The capability to direct housing development traffic to four lane highways as opposed to clogging rural roads with heavy commuter traffic congestion will continue to be the challenge for the farmers in our area.

Tax policies, at all levels of government, need to be reviewed to encourage the correct land use plans to be realized. The Clean and Green act of the 1960’s for 10 or more acres of contiguous land caused the rural sprawl to desecrate agricultural land. There are better ways to encourage agriculture. Frederick County, Maryland now taxes farmable land at 10 times higher if it is not actively farmed. This

allows land investors to own the land without taking it out of production thus continuing to support the agriculture industry.

It is important that large blocks of land with their rural roads are unencumbered by commuter traffic; this will encourage the long term use of the land for agriculture. One downfall of Pennsylvania having the most preserved land which is less than 3% agricultural land gives an illusion that these scattered preserved farms will remain competitive in the market place.

Pennsylvania can become a major supplier of efficient food and energy production, not because all regions of the state have great soils or large field areas as in the mid west, but because Pennsylvania has the rainfall and climate for animal agriculture which sustain the necessities for a well balanced diet suggested by the new federal pyramid guidelines. Pennsylvania's accessibility to nearby ports is our other asset for getting products to the other 96% of the world consumers.

A major characteristic of Pennsylvania Agriculture is the inherent farmer skills for animal food production in the state. Our area also has the necessary support industries nearby to efficiently supply and deliver the finishing feeds for the animal food production crucial for higher food value in the farm fresh diets proposed by the new federal food guidelines.

The ballot box will add the zest for a responsible decision-making future. Hand wringing destroys hope and positive stewardship.