

Agriculture – York’s First Industry

During June 1989, York County Commissioners authorized the creation of the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board in response to Pennsylvania Voter’s approval of a \$100 million bond to be used for farmland protection. A Land Use Planning and Agricultural Development Task Force had released their April 1989 recommendations for land protections in York County. Those recommendations included various strategies to preserve and protect productive farmlands. A York County Planning Commission report revealed our 1900 population at 125,000 and a 1980 population at 350,000. Farmland conversion figures revealed the fact that since 1940, farmland has decreased over 6 miles annually. Additional Planning Commission figures showed sometime between 1982 and 1987, a majority of the county no longer in farmland, but had been converted to non-agricultural uses. This alarming loss of farmland prompted County officials to examine closer our leading industry, agriculture.

If we look at the economic impact of agriculture in York County, one sees an industry that is producing each year, raw products valued at over \$ 120 million dollars at the farm gate. The Pennsylvania Farm Bureau estimates the value of farm products is multiplied four times as the farm product is further transported, processed, refined, packaged, marketed, and sold within our region. The PA Labor Department reports the agricultural industry is responsible for producing one in every 14 jobs in Pennsylvania.

As our best minds search for solutions to our economic recovery, let us recall the agricultural productivity that has been part of York County’s rural heritage. If we examine the various industries within our immediate community linked to agriculture we will find the building blocks which can sustain our local economy.

Agriculture is our first industry and provided mankind with the ability to establish permanent communities freeing us from the challenges of a nomadic life. Agriculture permitted humans to specialize in other endeavors rather than searching continuously for our next meal. Agriculture allowed us to literally build the society we enjoy today.

As we search for solutions to the current economic crisis, perhaps we should begin with a look into our own local roots. York County’s past begins with the tillage of the soil and the farmers who provided for those who were free to pursue other occupations such as, medicine, teaching, writing, music, construction, manufacturing, law, and all the other activities necessary for a society to thrive. Agriculture has been the keystone of our society for the past 200 years. Let us commit to the first industry of York County, agriculture, as we rebuild our economy.

The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board is committed to the preservation of farmland through easement purchases under the provisions of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The Ag Land Preserve Board has preserved 217 farms, covering 34,675 acres since 1990. During the recent 2009 application cycle, 32 new applications were received, bringing the total number of easement applications to 68 for 2009 consideration. For more information, call

717.840.7400. Office hours are Monday through Friday 8AM – 4:30PM. Office location
118 Pleasant Acres Road Suite F York PA 17402.