



Pennsylvania State Grange

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WHAT IS THE GRANGE DOING FOR US?

The Pennsylvania State Grange has a proud historic record of advocating for rural PA since its founding in 1873. It has fought for rural electrification and rural free delivery to name two. But, that was then and this is now. So, what is the PA State Grange doing for us in 2019?

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION and CAREERS

The PA State Grange continues to lobby for support of agricultural education and agricultural careers. Two specific items are making sure that the PA Department of Education supports the new Commission for Agricultural Education Excellence and that any legislation creating inter-agency job-finding resources have the PA Department of Agriculture as a formal member.

BROADBAND: Cell Phone and Internet Access

This is the top legislative priority of the PA State Grange. President Wayne Campbell testified before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees to remind legislators that this is critical to rural Pennsylvania – in educating our kids, enabling Telemedicine to work, farmers having more efficient agricultural production, and promoting economic growth by giving prospective employers the technology they need. PA State Grange testified repeatedly before legislative committees urging that this be a top state priority.

Some of the specific items on which we lobby are: continued support of land line telephones in rural areas that do not have access to cell phones or the Internet; technology “piggybacking” on existing state resources such as towers (HB 305); Broadband as a line item in the State Budget and continued support of the Governor’s Office and state agency efforts to expand Broadband; lobbying for legislation standardizing “small facilities” installation which expands access in smaller areas; setting up a firewall to prevent monies for Broadband being redirected to other purposes; and urging Federal support of universal access to Broadband in Pennsylvania. PA State Grange also actively supports Senate Resolution 47 which establishes a legislative commission to help the General Assembly remain focused on Broadband.

The PA State Grange hosts an annual program at the Farm Show to make the Broadband issue more visible to the general public.

DAIRY

PA State Grange focuses on increasing demand for fluid milk as our approach to helping dairy farmers. In particular, we advocate that whole milk be served in school meal programs and that products which are not truly milk be prevented from using the word ‘milk’ to identify their product. We also have repeatedly testified to the PA Milk Marketing Board and have urged policymakers to look at what other states like Massachusetts have done to help dairy farmers.

PA State Grange is a strong supporter for the Center for Dairy Excellence and efforts to strengthen processing of dairy products in the Commonwealth. In addition, the PA State Grange is a member of the brand-new Dairy Future Commission established by Act 66 of 2019.

Other dairy issues include: supporting legislation that authorizes funding for specific regional dairy processing facilities (Act 38 of 2019); supporting resolutions that direct the FDA to enforce their rule about mislabeling of milk; backing legislation (HB 915) which exempts milk haulers from Interstate traffic prohibitions when there is a weather emergency – NOTE: HB 915 was vetoed by Governor Wolf

DELAWARE RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

The PA State Grange opposes a 2018 move by the Delaware River Basin Commission to override Pennsylvania state sovereignty by going around PA's Act 13 which regulates development of Marcellus Shale natural gas. The Commission seeks to ban fracking in parts of northeastern PA. *NOTE: PA State Grange's position should not be seen as advocating or opposing fracking. It is against the Delaware River Basin Commission's decision to ignore Pennsylvania law to do what it wants to do, whether it be fracking, regulation of onlot septic systems, or other areas where the Commission has exceeded its authority.*

EMMINENT DOMAIN

The PA State Grange lobbies hard to curb the use of eminent domain to take preserved farmland.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The PA State Grange works with the PA Department of Agriculture to help farmers understand the importance of risk management. Risk management includes food safety, Crop Insurance, conservation practices and more. We work with like-minded groups like the PA State Council of Farm Organizations to further this goal.

HEALTH FOR RURAL PA

Internet medical care (Telemedicine) is crucial to rural residents who live farther away from medical facilities and doctors. Telemedicine allows the health care provider to, through the Internet, monitor someone's condition, observe symptoms, and direct treatment. PA State Grange supports Telemedicine bills. However, Broadband access is essential before Telemedicine works.

HUNGER

PA State Grange works with other agricultural groups to increase funding for the PA Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) in the State Budget. PASS integrates fresh farm products with food banks' distribution to give the needy a better selection of healthier foods.

HUNTING

PA State Grange opposes Sunday hunting (SB 147 and HB 1468). It is a matter of allowing other recreational uses of the outdoors to take place on a Sunday free from fear of inadvertently being shot. In addition, Sunday hunting is a shot in the dark to end declining numbers of licenses issued. There needs to be an in-depth analysis as why interest in hunting is waning. When we have answers to that, PA can better target solutions. Hunting and gun safety education (HB 102) is something we strongly believe in but there are possible solutions out there that have not yet been explored.

JUDICIAL (TORT) REFORM

PA State Grange supports legislation that streamlines our judicial system by enacting legislation designed to reduce the potential for frivolous lawsuits to be filed. One of these bills (HB 1348) provides civil liability immunity for farmers who wish to engage in agri-tourism or agri-entertainment. An urgent need for many farmers and particularly dairy farmers is to diversify income. Agri-tourism and agri-entertainment are promising but the fear of frivolous lawsuits holds them back.

MARCELLUS SHALE ROYALTIES

PA State Grange urges adoption of legislation to make sure property owners receive the full Marcellus Shale Gas royalties that are owed them per state law. We have allied ourselves with the PA Royalty Owners Association to further this goal.

PROPERTY TAXES

A targeted property tax issue on which the PA State Grange is working is legislation that would exempt Grange Halls over 100 years old from property taxes (HB 1478).

RIGHT TO FARM

The PA State Grange opposes efforts to prevent or restrict normal farming practices by municipalities or agencies.

STATE BUDGET

PA State Grange is heartened to see a real interest in adequately funding many Agricultural programs in the 2019-20 State Budget. We are tenacious advocates for full funding of PDA programs as well as for Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Research and Extension as well as the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. We also try to make sure that other programs such as conservation, County Fairs, farmland preservation, etc. are protected from the budget knife. Along with the National Grange, we support efforts to secure adequate funding for USDA and its programs.

STATE BUDGET BORROWING

PA State Grange opposes excessive state borrowing to balance the State Budget. We believe that the state should live within its means. We opposed the state taking out a home equity loan on the Farm Show Complex or an advance on the Tobacco Settlement – another loan to be paid back. A harm of this practice is that it is short sighted. Loans have to be paid back. Those payments reduce state monies that could be spent on other things. Part of that problem is robbing Peter to pay Paul per the saying by taking money out of dedicated fund accounts such as (in 2019) raiding the Environmental Stewardship Fund to pay for regular operations of state agencies. What happens when you actually need that Fund? Too late. We spent it all.

TRANSPORTATION

PA State Grange supports a ban on hand-held cell phone use and texting while driving (HB 37).

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