

VIEWPOINT

Bruce F. Shank, Editor

Action is needed to stop loss of extension personnel

Cuts in agricultural extension programs serving the Green Industry prove that the message of the significance of our industries is not getting to Congress. More than 1,000 extension personnel lose their jobs to budget cuts each year and a gloomy fiscal 1980 budget will not improve the situation.

How long are we going to wait until we act, make our representatives be responsive to our needs and to recognize the significance of our markets?

What's the use? Senators and Congressmen never see their mail, they just have an aide send a form letter telling you how the regulations make any improvements impossible.

Fortunately, in this case, the solution has become the responsibility of an Advisory Board, The National Agricultural Research and Extension Users Advisory Board. The first meeting of this Board was announced to the trade press two weeks prior to the meeting in Washington April 30, not much time to prepare or plan to attend in my opinion.

There is still a chance for input if we act immediately. The NAREUAB will begin preparation of a report to the President and Secretary of Agriculture at a meeting scheduled for July 10. The group will submit this report in October and must have it completed sometime in September.

Currently, the Board is made up of 21 appointees, none of which represent the turf or ornamental horticulture industries. There are however, appointees representing environmental interest groups, agricultural production and nutrition. These individuals have strong feelings about their industries and will devote their full attention to these. Noone is there to represent the Green Industries.

Agricultural lobbyists lack concern for the Green Industries. The USDA is made up of hard core agricultural personnel who got their education at Land Grant Colleges, few, if any in ornamental horticulture or turf management. They seem to overlook the non-food markets when policy decisions are being considered.

The Green Industries can't rely on the farmer for protecting their extension service helpers. Our associations must quickly make direct contact with the Advisory Board to represent our interests during the priority setting sessions.

The person to contact is James Meyers, Executive Secretary, National Agricultural Research and Extension Users Advisory Board, Room 349-A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250, 202/447-3684. The USDA Information Office has assigned Howard Hass to cover the Board full time. He can be contacted at 202/447-2863.

Input from landscape contractors, nurserymen, arborists, golf course superintendents, irrigation contractors, and reclamation supervisors is essen-

tial to avoid further cutbacks in ornamental and turf programs through extension.

Currently, the President's budget is \$40 million beneath the amount conservatively proposed by the National Association of County Agricultural Agents. Its figures were based upon a 7 percent inflation rate, far below the actual 14 percent rate.

The President has proposed a reduction in both extension and research budgets in 1980 from 1979. Maintaining current levels would have required cutbacks because of inflation. A reduction will mean severe cutbacks in extension and research services. The President has proposed a serious near elimination of the programs for agricultural teaching and education. This translates into 600 lost teaching jobs and a severe reduction in training of future educators for agricultural sciences.

Urban Forestry programs, an effort to replace lost vegetation in urban areas, is listed as the lowest priority for extension. Before it comes maintenance of current programs, restoration of programs cut by the President, and nutrition research.

We all realize that to balance the budget some things have to be cut. But the President is cutting his own budget to pieces if he discontinues programs which result in more tax revenue through increased output.

Extension and research are some of the few programs in government that provide a return on investment. Measuring the return is difficult and therefore disregarded by policy makers. Furthermore, they never will be inclined to measure return until they are encouraged by voters to do so.

A single vote may seem insignificant, but thousands make representatives take notice. The Green Industries must use the power of the vote to make their message heard, now, and with permanent reinforcement.

I think most of us, including this magazine, have neglected what goes on in Washington. Apathy some call it, or avoiding the complex and unpleasant things in life. This negligence could cost us in jobs and growth in the future if we don't act now.

Weeds Trees & Turf will strive to uncover and pass on more government news in the future. We will arrange and publish interviews with key officials affecting the Green Industries. We will publish news about association efforts in Washington.

Hopefully, with this material in your hands, you and 45,000 other readers can have an influence on government by knowledgeable reaction to policies that affect your business. **WTT**