



PUBLIC ISSUES EDUCATION

West Virginia University Extension Service Volume 1, No. 2

Welcome Again!

For those of you who don't know me, I am Michael Dougherty, a specialist in the Division of Community and Economic Development -- and the new editor of this newsletter.

The purpose of this publication continues to be to provide Extension personnel with an overview of policy issues that are likely to have an impact on the work they do. What will be changing is how this newsletter is delivered. This issue is being sent to the county offices and to divisions offices. Future issues will be distributed using technology such as the World Wide Web.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Editorial Board and the contributors. Without their work, this newsletter would not be possible.

If there is anything you would like to contribute to a future issue or see discussed in the newsletter, please feel free to contact me. My telephone number is (304) 293-8733. My E-mail is MDOERTY@wvnmms.wvnet.edu.

Michael Dougherty
Extension Specialist

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State Budget Report

by Paul R. Martinelli
Extension Administrative Assistant

The West Virginia General Revenue Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 1996-1997 was passed by the Legislature, signed by the Governor, and took effect on July 1.

For the second consecutive year no new taxes were enacted by legislators. The amount approved for spending was \$2.35 billion, an increase of approximately \$71 million from last year.

Over the last three years, **higher education** has shown a small but steady increase in funding to its present level of 15.3 percent of the budget (\$360.4 million). In comparison, in FY 1994-95, it was 14.3 percent of the budget (\$327.1 million) and in FY 1995-96, 15.1 percent (\$344.2 million). This represents a full percentage point increase over the last three years. But funding levels are no where near the 1969 General Revenue Budget's 18 percent.

If the 18 percent figure is applied to the FY 1996-97 budget, approximately \$63.3 million more than the current funding levels would be spent on higher education.

Meanwhile, the share of funds for **public education** has continued to decrease. It has gone from 55.6 percent of the budget in FY 1994-95 (\$1,235.4 million), to 55.0 percent in FY 1995-96 (\$1,255.2 million), to 54.8 percent in FY 1996-97 (\$1,289.7 million). This is a decrease of nearly

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■ Budget (From Page 1)

two percentage points but still represents an increase in funding of \$34.5 million.

Also, 1.1 percent of the budget goes for the executive branch (\$25.9 million), 2.8 percent for the legislative and judicial branches (\$65.2 million), 16.0 percent for the Department of Health and Human Resources (\$376.6 million), and 10.0 percent for other state agencies (\$236.2 million).

Legislative Wrap-Up

by Shirley Eagan
Extension Specialist, retired

The 1996 Legislative session completed its work in mid-March. Lawmakers passed into law 268 bills out of 1,645 introduced during the second half of the 72nd Legislature. Issues focused on strongly included enhancing the state's economic climate, allowing for state investments, improving the educational system, providing for public safety, initiating reform of the state's welfare system, and providing tax relief for the state's poorest citizens.

The Legislature adjourned its session with the passage of a \$2.35 billion budget, a reserve in the state's Rainy Day Fund of approximately \$54 million (as of March), money for teacher and state trooper pay raises, a low-income tax exemption, and money for flood relief -- without a tax increase. Some of the bills passed achieved the following:

- Provided \$7.5 million to assist counties severely affected by heavy snows and flooding.
- Approved a supplemental appropriation for flood relief for damaged farm goods not covered by FEMA -- i.e., animals, hay, machinery and fences.
- Exempted people earning less than \$10,000 a year from state personal income tax payments.
- Reduced the state's business franchise tax, effective June 30, 1997.

- Provided the opportunity for taxpayers making contributions of cash, property, and professional services to non-profit community improvement programs to receive a state tax credit through the Neighborhood Investment Program Act.

- Funded capital improvements at state colleges and universities, state parks, the Capitol complex and other state tourism sites through the issuance of \$100 million in revenue bonds. Money from this bill will also construct and equip the West Virginia Education Center for Arts and Science in Charleston.

- Passed a "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" to ensure refunds within 90 days of filing a personal income tax. Another provision calls for the refund of fees administered under the state Tax Procedure and Administration Act when fees have been mistakenly collected.

- Included in the West Virginia Works Act a pilot program designed to employ at least 15 percent of the state's welfare recipients, a start in revising the state's welfare system.

- Allowed banks to enhance their electronic services to customers.

- Passed the Voluntary Remediation and Redevelopment Act to assist businesses to remediate contaminated commercial and industrial sites -- known as "Brownfields."

- Inserted a provision in West Virginia's unemployment compensation law to allow collection of payments from negligent businesses through legal action.

- Enacted the Jobs Through Education Act to help raise academic expectations and increase career development opportunities for students.

- Approved the merger of West Virginia Institute of Technology with WVU.

- Made it a felony to remove or injure timber valued at more than \$1,000.

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■ Legislature (From Page 2)

- Strengthened the law to allow for alternative schooling for disruptive students.
- Permitted disclosure of juvenile criminal records to local law enforcement agencies.
- Required sexual offenders to register with the state police and to not change their names.
- Approved the Child Bicycle Safety Act that requires all children age 14 and under wear helmets when riding bicycles on public property. Penalties include a \$10 fine or two hours of community service for the parent or guardian of the child. The Governor's Highway Safety Program will be conducting an educational and public awareness program designed to encourage people to comply with the new law.
- Provided individuals covered by health maintenance organizations with certain protections through the creation of the HMO guaranty association.
- Simplified the computation of child support payments by replacing the current formula with an "income shares" model formula, effective July 1, 1997. Persons who consistently fail to provide support and accumulate an arrearage of \$8,000 will be guilty of a felony.
- Created a separate license category of "family day care centers," for those families which care for seven to twelve children. (*See article on Page 5*).
- Permitted any state employee who is a certified disaster volunteer of the American Red Cross a paid 15-day leave from his/her employment to participate in Red Cross disaster relief services.
- Exempted county boards of education from liability for the acts of those who use school board property for community events, under certain circumstances. The liability is limited when the user has insurance coverage for any personal injury claims which may arise.

Information adapted from *Wrap-Up* (newsletter of the West Virginia Legislature), Vol. 7, No. 8, Spring 1996.

Higher Education Grants

by Paul R. Martinelli

Extension Administrative Assistant

Student fee revenues at state colleges and universities total \$1.8 million annually. Higher Education Resource Fee (HERF) monies are contributed to the West Virginia Higher Education Grant Program. These funds are contributed only by students enrolled in public institutions within the University System of West Virginia.

Students enrolled in West Virginia independent colleges also participate in the grant program and receive approximately 25 percent of all funds available.

This program began in 1968 with a state appropriation of \$25,000. Funding grew and tripled in 1975. During that time, federal State Student Incentive Grant Program (SSIG) funds became available. A third source of funds was added in the early 1980s when HERF was established.

Since the HERF legislation, a portion of this revenue has been allocated to the grant program and has totaled \$1.8 million. For FY 1995-96, HERF funds were anticipated to provide about 21.5 percent of all available Grant Program funds.

During the period since HERF funds were included in the grant program, there has been a shift in the direction of a higher percentage of overall grant program funds to public college students and a lower percentage to independent students. While the percent of grant program dollars going to higher education has been going up, the proportion to private institutions has been declining.

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■ HERF (From Page 3)

The 1996-97 Legislative Budget Digest has an allocation from the lottery surplus for the Higher Education Grant Program of \$3.0 million that may be spent over the next two years. The digest states that it is the intent of the Legislature that students receiving these funds may have the opportunity of continuity of funding for at least a two-year period. It is the further intent that this source of funds not be construed as one-time funding and the Legislature intends to attempt to provide enhanced higher education grants funding on a continuing basis.

1996 Farm Bill in Brief

by Tom McConnell
Extension Farm Management Advisor

The much-debated and long-awaited 1995 Farm Bill was finally passed as the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996. The responsibility to create and deliver programs that satisfy the intent of this enabling legislation lies with USDA leaders.

One intention of the Congress is certain -- to get the government out of the farming business. This act will, over a seven-year period, drastically change the relationship between the USDA and American agriculture. *Title 1: Agricultural Market Transition Act* sets this in motion.

Beginning this year, target prices, deficiency payments and acreage reduction programs are replaced by a Production Flexibility Contract, which includes seven fixed but declining annual payments that will not change as a result of market conditions. The first provision of the Agricultural Market Transition Act also eliminates grazing restrictions on contract acres.

Many West Virginians perceive the farm bill as something that deals with big agriculture. The notion prevails that this is not important to us. This is not true. This is a big deal. Why? In 1995, according to the West Virginia Consolidated Farm Service, 4,664 West Virginia farms had a crop acreage base making them eligible for participation in a Production Flexibility Contract, totaling 92,140 eligible acres. Counties with eligible farms include: Berkeley (295 farms), Grant (370), Greenbrier (370), Hampshire (182), Hardy (198), Jefferson (293), Mason (284), Monroe (394), Pendleton (239), Pocahontas (296), Preston (275) and Randolph (110).

The act established a \$40,000 per person annual cap. Program spending has been capped, starting at \$5.57 billion in 1996 and declining to about \$4.01 billion in 2002.

The Agricultural Market Transition Act is not just a bill that eliminates the traditional deficiency payments and acreage reduction programs. Some programs will remain in place, just as before. The Marketing Assistance Loans will be available similar to last year. Loan formulas will be maintained for wheat, feed grain, upland cotton, and extra length staple cotton. There will be some changes for other crops.

Dairy price support will be eliminated after 1999. Price support rates on butter, nonfat dry milk and cheese will be reduced over four years, from the current rate of \$10.35 per hundred pounds to \$9.90.

The act also terminated the authority to assess marketings of milk after May 1, 1996. Nationally, this program refunded \$82 million of assessments to dairies that did not market more milk than they did the previous year. In West Virginia, 119 dairies will be refunded \$179,404.32.

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■ Farm Bill (From Page 4)

The Federal Crop Insurance programs will be more firmly attached to the private sector. Catastrophic coverage will be sold privately. This will break any of the linkage requirements needed for participation in any disaster or related programs.

Finally, the price support/loan program for honey will perish with this act too.

The complete text of this article is available on the World Wide Web home page of the West Virginia University Extension Service:

●<http://www.wvu.edu/users/agexten/www/v1i2/farmbill.htm>

Other Farm Bill related web sites include:

●<http://www.usda.gov> -- USDA

●<http://www.iastate.edu/General/Farm> -- Iowa State

●<http://www.tamu.edu> -- Texas A&M

New Child Care Legislation

by Rachel Tompkins
Extension Specialist

The Legislature passed a \$2 million appropriation for child care in its 1996-97 budget. Although less than the \$3 million requested by Governor Caperton, the new funding will still go a long way to promote quality, affordable child care for West Virginia children.

Creative planning by officials during implementation will lead to more than \$3.5 million of new investment of federal and state resources into child care services. The \$2 million will be allocated as follows:

- \$1.2 million for Resource and Referral (R&R) Agencies, ensuring every county will have one.

- \$200,000 for improved monitoring of child care. Six new licensing staff are being hired which brings

the state much closer to the national average ratio of licensing staff to providers and will enable support for the new family day care category for facilities serving seven to twelve children.

- \$500,000 for working families. The money will be matched 3-to-1, resulting in a total of \$2 million in subsidies. This will substantially reduce the waiting list of eligible poor working families.

- \$100,000 for Energy Express program (*See article on Page 6*).

In addition to the \$2 million in state funds and their match, the Department of Health and Human Resources reallocated \$500,000 of the Federal Child Care Development Block Grant to support the development of additional before and after school and summer child care programs.

In addition to new funding, the Legislature passed a law creating a new category of licensing for family day care facilities serving seven to twelve children. The Department of Health and Human Resources has just issued more appropriate regulations for these facilities. The regulations for family child care providers serving six or fewer children remain unchanged.

The Governors Early Childhood Implementation Commission has created an interagency Child Care Committee to guide the initiative. Georgette Comuntzis Page and Ruthellen Phillips serve on the committee representing WVU Extension. This committee is charged with developing coordinated plans for the entire early childhood education and care system which includes Governor Caperton's initiative, Welfare Reform, the Carnegie Corporation-funded Starting Points project, and all existing programs including Head Start.

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■ Child Care (From Page 5)

These fundamental changes in funding and law provide many opportunities for extension educators: expanding training and Energy Express, assisting in the start-up of new R&R agencies, training for new family day care facilities, and helping create before and after school programs. For information, call Georgette Page or Ruthellen Phillips at (304) 293-2694 or Rachel Tompkins at (304) 293-6967.

Energy Express in W.Va.

by Ruthellen Phillips
Extension Specialist

There was lots of activity this summer in 38 West Virginia communities. They were the 1996 sites of Energy Express, the six-week summer program designed to promote the school success of children living in rural and low-income communities.

Two-hundred and fifty-one college students spent several days in June on the WVU campus, learning how to work with small groups of children. Training focused on integrating reading, writing, and art in a print-rich environment, participating in family-style meals, and involving parents in children's learning. Then those mentors went to work serving 1,800 school-age children. They were supported by site coordinators, county extension agents, and other local resources.

Children received 3½ hours of educational enrichment each day of the program. They read aloud and silently, wrote their own stories and poems, turned stories into dramas and puppet shows and created beautiful art that enhances the literature. On Fridays, each child received a take-home book. Just think -- 1,800 children started their own personal libraries!

Breakfast and lunch were served family-style, with each small group of mentors and children eating

together. What a social experience this was as children learned to share, cooperate, listen and care!

Community involvement was critical to the success of Energy Express. As each community shared in the building of a program that works, relationships were strengthened and visions were expanded. Boards of education, family resource networks, community action organizations, libraries, community groups and organizations -- all joined forces with WVU Extension Service to make Energy Express work. Thus Energy Express is a model for demonstrating how parents, schools, and community organizations can join forces with state agencies and organizations to make a difference in the lives of West Virginia's children, families and communities.

The **Public Issues Education Newsletter** is produced
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