



June 29, 2009

Mr. George Peters, President
Erie Crawford Cooperative
7733 Rt. 97
P.O. Box 312
Union City, Pennsylvania 16438

Dear Mr. Peters,

Thank you for your recent letter and petitions encouraging the Erie County Technical School to start an agricultural program for high school students. We shared your letter and the petitions with the Joint Operating Committee at their June 25 meeting. The committee discussed your request.

The committee shares and appreciates your sentiments about agriculture leading the Pennsylvania economy and the vast career opportunities in the industry—both locally and across the state. The technical school has worked on an agriculture-based program. In 2005, we conducted two curriculum development sessions to identify the content areas a natural resources/environmental sciences program would teach. A panel of local industry experts participated in those sessions. I have included a copy of their final report for review.

The Erie County Technical School is anxious to start a career pathway in agriculture for young people in Erie County. We are confident there are enough students interested in this pathway to sustain a program, especially with the visibility of 'green' opportunities and other environmental awareness activities. Three main issues hinder our ability to start an agricultural program: program approval by the state department of education; space availability at the technical school; and, of course, funding.

The first issue we face is the Pennsylvania Department of Education requires prior approval of any new career and technical education program that will receive a state subsidy. One requirement within program approval is the presence of 'industry jobs' on a regional or statewide 'high priority occupation' list. The Department of Labor and Industry establishes the high priority lists. Unfortunately, other than veterinary technicians, there are virtually no agriculture-based occupations on the lists. In fact, some of the occupations within the state's agriculture industry cluster include order clerks, shipping clerks, packers, truck drivers and sales representatives. I do not think these are the kinds of occupations you have in mind for an agriculture program. I have included copies of recent high priority lists for your review.

The second hindrance to the technical school starting a new program is space availability. At the current time, we have no open space to start a new program. In fact, several of our programs are operating in undersized laboratories. The operating committee and superintendents have

Mr. George Peters
June 29, 2009
Page 2

discussed adding new programs, but realize space is a major issue. We are in a feasibility study to determine space needs for current and new programs and the probable costs for a building renovation and expansion. As you know, school construction projects are a difficult proposition under our current economy, especially when we rely on the support of eleven school districts—all of which must approve a building project for the technical school.

As you might expect, the remaining issue is funding. The curriculum development work we did in 2005 estimated program start-up costs at nearly \$250,000. The estimate included over \$100,000 in equipment and \$80,000 in personnel. The remaining funds covered furniture, instructional materials and supplies. I am sure these estimated costs are higher today. An additional \$250,000 expense in our 2009-2010 budget represents a 7% increase to our school districts.

Please be assured an agriculture-based program is on the horizon at the Erie County Technical School. The operating committee welcomes the opportunity to work with the Cooperative to see if there are solutions to these issues. There may be ways, working together, that we can work around the approval, space and funding problems. If you or a group from your membership would like to talk about this, please feel free to contact me at (814) 464-8661. I would be happy to arrange a meeting with the operating committee or myself.

Sincerely yours,



Aldo R. Jackson, Ph.D.
Director

Enclosures: DACUM for Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
High Priority Occupations 2008
High Priority Occupations 2009