

The Recorder

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Augusta Farm Bureau opposes pipeline project

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WEYERS CAVE — On a 46-21 vote Monday at the annual membership meeting, the producer members of the Augusta County Farm Bureau agreed to formally oppose the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline and similar pipeline projects.

The ACP would be a 42-inch, 600-mile natural gas pipeline that starts in West Virginia, goes through Virginia, and terminates deep in North Carolina. Nearly 57 miles of the ACP are proposed to cut through Augusta County. All 16 resolutions put before the Augusta farm bureau's membership passed and will be sent on to the state level for consideration as policy by the state organization at its annual meeting later this year.

The collection of resolutions was an important reminder of the significance of farming in the Shenandoah Valley and, in particular, Augusta County. Agriculture is, collectively, the leading business in Augusta and the county ranks second in the state in agricultural production behind Rockingham. The county leads the state in the amount of farm acreage as well as topping the state in hay, sheep, and beef production.

The resolution that will be sent to the state committee reads as follows:

The Augusta County Farm Bureau membership votes to: "Oppose the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and similar natural gas transmission line projects on the grounds that the use of eminent domain for such projects is not appropriate. Such projects adversely affect groundwater, crop production, livestock health, public safety, our agricultural heritage, and common natural treasures.

"Pipelines should be allowed to cross farm lands only with the freely-given consent of the landowners and with proper and appropriate fair treatment and just compensation for landowners who experience damages and disruptions caused by the pipeline construction or occurring after pipeline construction. Therefore any construction should be halted while need and ratepayer costs are evaluated."

Two farmers who were supportive of the pipeline-related resolution were Bill Francisco, who farms 200 acres in southern Augusta County, and Leo Tammi who is a sheep producer in northern Augusta.

“Farm Bureau members are, by nature, protective of their land and how it is used or abused by outside agents,” said Francisco of why he voted in favor of the resolution. “Eminent domain doesn’t always sit well with people who live on farms that have been in the family for many generations. I think the vote to protect farmland also indicates that more and more people are realizing there is little or no public need for this pipeline, so using eminent domain for it seems especially unfair.”

According to the farm bureau, since the ACP was first proposed it has become clear, based on Dominion’s own information and other studies, that the pipeline is not needed to meet Virginians’ realistic demands for natural gas and electric power. Virginia and the region already are served by an existing gas pipeline network with ample capacity. Regular utility customers, including farmers, would bear the cost of the unneeded, expensive new Atlantic Coast Pipeline in their monthly power bills. Local organizations and citizens continue to seek an objective, thorough assessment of need, impacts, and customer costs before this project is allowed to go forward, the bureau said.

Tammi echoed Francisco’s sentiments, adding, “We Valley farmers support land stewardship principles and promote soil and water conservation practices. I have had to adhere to and have the Department of Environmental Quality sign off on engineering designs and construction on stream livestock crossings that I have installed. It is unacceptable that pipeline contractors are subject to less scrutiny than a single sheep or cow crossing a stream.”

In addition, Tammi made reference to the water resources of Augusta County, which is home to the headwaters of both the James and the Shenandoah Rivers. The ACP is proposed to cross Augusta streams and rivers 189 times. “We farmers are proud to have done our part to help clean up Middle River (a tributary of the Shenandoah). Twenty-three miles have been delisted from the dirty water register. That progress is at risk from a single incident on the 89 proposed pipeline crossings just in Middle River and its tributaries by this pipeline.”

Tammi added he was proud to stand with his neighbors in support of clean water. “Augusta County is noted for and famed for its water resources. That should not be traded for big corporate profits.