

Sean
Dempsey
Profile



Jackie Costa, FREEMAN STAFF

Sean Dempsey, who lives on a farm in the town of Eagle, has noticed an unfairness and a disparity in the amount of taxes he pays on his land, part of which is in the town of Eagle and part in the town of Palmyra.

DPI to probe tax increases

Town of Eagle farmer is example of discrepancy

By Jackie Costa
Freeman Staff

TOWN OF EAGLE — Sean Dempsey can see his tall, blue silos from along the winding roads of the scenic Kettle Moraine.

As he approaches his 1,000-acre farm, he wonders why his property taxes have increased so dramatically.

Dempsey, 30, has helped work the farm since the 1960s and believes there is an unfairness in taxation of his property. He paid between \$18,000 and \$19,000 in property taxes in 1985. In 1989, the amount jumped to about \$32,000, he said.

Part of his farm is in the town of Palmyra and part is in the town of Eagle. Because it is assessed differently, Dempsey pays more on the land in the town of Eagle. His said his problem is linked to the Kettle Moraine Forest, which is owned by the state Department of Natural Resources. DNR land is not on the tax roll.

Dempsey is not the only one who has called attention to the discrepancy. Many families throughout the Palmyra-Eagle School District have voiced frustration over their tax increases.

Paul Endres, consultations and audit section chief at the state

The Next Step

- **What:** Investigation of the equalization formula used in the Palmyra-Eagle School District and the effect it has on taxpayers
- **When:** Report to be complete by Monday, Sept. 23
- **Where:** Department of Public Instruction in Madison
- **Who:** Paul Endres, consultations and audit section chief at the Department of Public Instruction, 608-266-2804

Department of Public Instruction, will try to find some reasons for these tax differences this week.

In 1985, the School District's tax rate was \$15.36 per \$1,000 of equalized value. In 1990, the rate was \$20.42.

A recent Legislative Fiscal Bureau study analyzing the fiscal effect public land has on the Palmyra-Eagle School District shows the equalization formula for such instances is working, said Meggan Plufka, legislative

assistant to state Rep. Stephen L. Nass, R-Whitewater.

Endres, however, will investigate further. So far he has found the DNR owns 14.5 percent of the land in the town of Palmyra and 33 percent of the land in the town of Eagle. Next he will compare the School District's equalized value, enrollment and costs shared with the state over the past five years, he said. He plans to report his findings by the beginning of next week.

His findings "will better explain to residents what has happened to the School District in terms of property taxes and an increase in the tax levy," he said.

"This will help the district decide what it can do to lower the levy," he said.

In cases like Dempsey's, where property taxes have almost doubled, the increase is not only because of an increase in the School District taxes.

The property tax increase during the past five years is also the result of assessment adjustments or property improvements.

"The formula works. It just doesn't seem to be. Now we will start looking at the reason," Plufka said. "This is troubling (for residents)."