

All of the more than 285,000 empty beer cans being dumped from this 42-foot-long trailer from the Archambeau Distributing Co. of Pontiac were collected from Oakland County retailers. Weighing 12 tons, it

was the first delivery of deposit beverage cans to National Steel's Can Reclamation Center. They will be recycled into new steel at National's Ecorse plant.

Container deposit law is costly, but cuts litter

BY MAURIE WALKER

Michigan's bottle bill, which went into effect Dec. 3, is reportedly serving its purpose by reducing litter. At the same time, however, it's costing distributors, wholesalers, retailers and customers a lot of money.

For distributors, perhaps the hardest hit financially, the law has meant the investment of millions of dollars for new equipment, additional help and expansion of warehouse facilities to handle the tons of bottles and cans being returned daily.

Distributors throughout the state have been preparing for the recycling process since shortly after voters passed the mandatory deposit by a 2-1 margin more than two years ago.

Aluminum can and bottle manufacturers, as well as steel firms, are now geared to recycle the millions of beverage containers being returned by consumers, but at a heavy expense.

In Livonia, Action Distributing Co., a beer distributor, has added a \$1 million addition to its warehouse. While Action did have a recycling area where aluminum cans are processed, the company was forced to spend and additional \$200,000 for glass crushing and sorting equipment.

Ben Celani, owner of Action, said the glass crusher is equipped to separate three different types of bottles — green, brown and clear.

"We recycle approximately 7,000 cases of empty cans and bottles in one shift each day, and this is the slack season."

"When warmer weather comes and beer sales increase, we expect this figure will double and we will have to put on two shifts to handle the recycling," Celani said. In addition to the expense of new equipment, which includes balers for wrapping empty cartons, Action has hired a number of new persons, many of them students, to operate the recycling machinery.

Pepsi-Cola Bottling Co., one of the state's largest soft drink manufacturers, has invested more than \$52 million converting to an all-returnable market. A spokesman for Pepsi-Cola said, "Our 22 plants has been expanded, new warehouses built, and new employees added to the payroll. Even package labeling has changed to remind shoppers to return (the container) for refund."

Throwaway bottles and cans were convenient. Returning for refund means work. But it pays," he added.

In February, Great Lakes Steel, a division of National Steel Corp. located in Ecorse, recycled into new steel the first of more than 24 million beverage cans collected by National Steel.

The initial shipment of shredded, densified can scrap was trucked to the plant's River Rouge blast furnaces from the corporation's reclamation center in Taylor.

Since shortly after the Michigan deposit law became effective, National Steel has been purchasing used, flattened, deposit-voided cans from soft drink and beer distributors for \$75 per gross ton delivered at its can reclamation center in Taylor.

National Steel is prepared to purchase

and recycle all of the estimated one billion deposit beverage cans to be used in Michigan this year. This would amount to approximately 45,000 tons of cans, which compares with the division's annual iron production of approximately four million tons.

Aluminum Co. of America (Alcoa) is one of the leaders in recycling in Michigan by offering to take back both aluminum and steel cans.

More than a year ago, Alcoa offered beer and soft drink wholesalers a program and supporting equipment to automatically receive, flatten and self-load for shipment all aluminum and steel cans returned for deposit.

Since 1970, Alcoa has pioneered systems to collect, process and ship large volumes of can scrap to reclamation plants. In 1977, Alcoa recycled 2.2 billion aluminum cans — about 94 million pounds of metal. This is equivalent to about half the annual production of an average aluminum smelter.

Alcoa provided each participating wholesaler with the flattening machine which loads the cans into trailers. It also provides 40-foot trailers to stores that redeem containers.

The returnable container system is not new.

Today, returnable cans and bottles are sent from stores and bars back to distributors to be processed with the consumer receiving a refund for each bottle or can returned. Years ago, it was mainly bottles that were returnable since the use of cans was not as popular.

Canton's farmland preservation fight goes on

By DARLENE STINSON

farmers' development rights.

But the Canton Board of Trustees has pledged to keep the farmland preservation issue alive by scheduling another election to consider the matter by June, 1981.

Township officials have also begun a new effort to seek federal or state funds that would offset the estimated \$15 million cost of purchasing farmers' development rights.

ECOLOGICAL AND aesthetic thinking spurred preliminary efforts to save some 5,000 acres of agricultural land west of Canton Center Road from mounting development pressures about four years ago.

Canton Township was (and still is) one of the fastest growing communities in southeastern Michigan, and farmland was disappearing at an alarming rate.

The proposal to preserve the farmland in the township's western half was bolstered by a \$30,000 financial study conducted by Canton's planning consultants.

The study was geared to a proposed development rights program that has never been tried anywhere in Michigan. Similar programs have been successfully implemented in only a handful of communities throughout the United States.

Under a development rights program, farmers sell their rights to develop their land in exchange for a pledge that the land will never be used for any purpose other than farming. Once development rights are sold, the land is taxed for its agricultural value rather than its potential developed use.

Although township officials estimated the cost of purchasing farmers' development rights at \$15 million, the financial study concluded that Canton taxpayers would pay less over the long run if farmland were preserved.

The study compared the cost of purchasing development rights to the cost of providing municipal services to the land if it were developed.

ALTHOUGH THE four-mill request to save the farms was defeated Nov. 7, proponents of a farmland preservation program were encouraged by the slim 509-vote margin that killed the issue.

The proposition appeared on the same ballot as the proposed Headlee and Tisch amendments. Many election observers had predicted that the farming issue would fail by a landslide.

The farmland proposal served as a major political issue in last fall's hotly-contested race for the township board. Some candidates who favored farmland preservation publicly stated that the four-mill request was excessively high. They wanted to lobby for state or

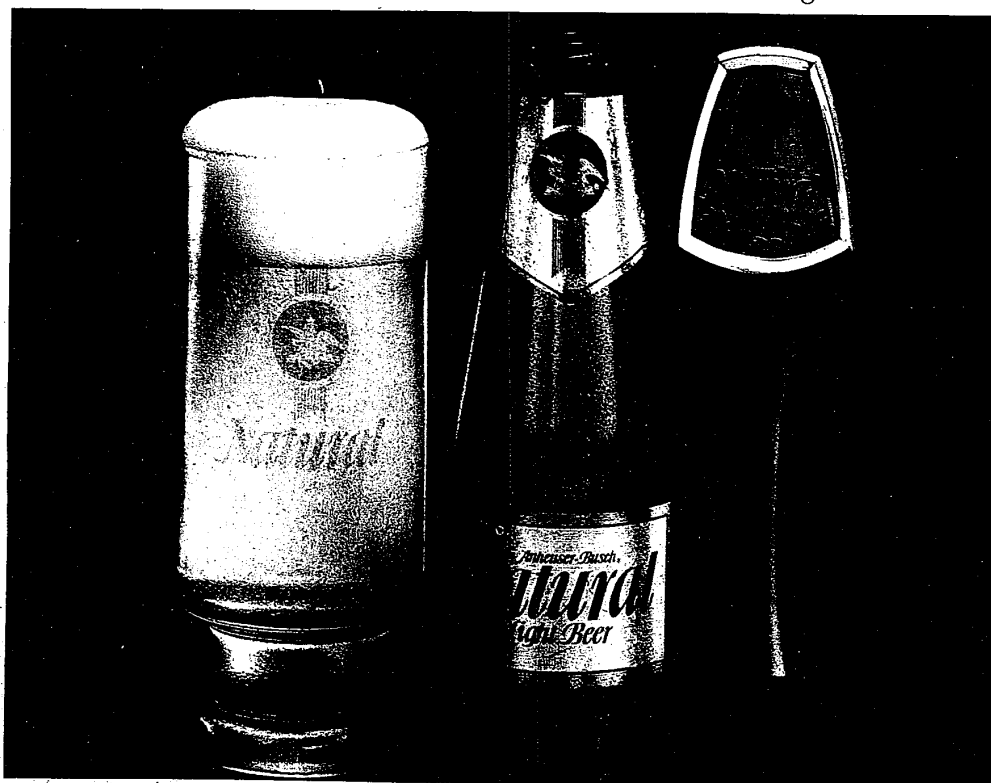
federal funds that would help defray the program's cost.

Virtually every candidate who was elected to the township board last November has publicly endorsed the farmland preservation issue. Incumbents who had taken a lukewarm stand were ousted by a substantial voter margin.

Until another election is scheduled on the issue, farmers are holding onto their wait-and-see attitude.

Township planners are finalizing a new master land use plan which zones thousands of acres for agricultural and industrial use, even though the plan may have to be rewritten if another farmland ballot proposition fails.

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