

TESTIMONY
PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANGE
AGRICULTURE FUNDING HEARING
SENATE & HOUSE AGRICULTURE & RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEES
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Since 1873, the PA State Grange has represented farm families and consumers in education, advocacy and support of the importance of Pennsylvania Agriculture in both the economic and social fabric of the Commonwealth.

We are submitting this testimony to the Senate and House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees because of the urgency of the unresolved Fiscal Year 2015-16 State Budget.

PA State Grange asks that you look deeper at specific examples where the Budget Impasse has hit.

Please consider:

- A farmer needs advice on proper pesticide practices.
- A farmer needs advice on complying with the myriad of new Federal Food Safety Modernization Act requirements.
- A farmer needs guidance on Chesapeake Bay-friendly and EPA-compliant farming practices.
- A farmer needs to know what to expect from the new expanded Federal definition of Waters of the US (WOTUS) which may expand EPA regulatory authority over much of Pennsylvania Agriculture.

Where does this assistance to farmers come from? The Penn State agriculture research and Extension line items were vetoed in December. Note that the significance of these line item vetoes has huge environmental and biosecurity consequences.

Please consider:

A stated priority right now is developing career paths that lead to numerous professions that support Pennsylvania Agriculture. PA needs agricultural scientists and veterinarians just as it needs to encourage young people to develop a general interest in agriculture. Consumer education on where our food comes from is a priority just as understanding basics of biosecurity is important in today's society.

Line items that strengthen these career paths and consumer appreciation and understanding were vetoed.

Please consider this program example:

Farmers need access to expertise in their farming operations. Pennsylvania beef producers depend on the Center for Beef Excellence for best management practices. What are the best ways to maximize output in a farming operation? How does an agricultural producer minimize input costs?

This program was eliminated by the stroke of a pen.

Consider the Center for Beef Excellence's under the radar track record.

- Center for Beef Excellence works with USDA to increase knowledge of the cattle feeding segment of the cattle industry by providing reports supplied by USDA that contain carcass data. These reports provide insights into ways to improve quality and consistency of the beef product. There are 96 USDA inspected cattle programs in PA (out of 871 nationally). Increasing availability of inspected facilities will increase availability of locally-produced beef.
- 12,500 tags have been distributed to PA cattle producers in partnership with PA Department of Agriculture that equip cattle producers with a marketing tool to confidentially promote locally raised beef.

These are not sexy media visible programs and they do not put the sizzle in the steak if you will forgive the bad metaphor. The Center for Beef Excellence is designed to provide quietly capable resources to aid the 11,800-plus Pennsylvania beef producers who raise over 1.6 million head of cattle.

And it is only one example. No funds to market PA products nationally and globally, elimination of the Center for Dairy Excellence, no support for Pennsylvania's hard wood industry and so forth, etc. are each an example of this budgetary mayhem.

Funding for important programs that have a direct bearing on the present and future of Pennsylvania Agriculture were vetoed. Those making the decision probably were totally unfamiliar with what programs such as the Center for Beef Excellence or Extension or Hardwood Development do.

The PA State Grange certainly does not question the dedication of PA Department of Agriculture officials in advocating the importance of these programs to others in the Administration.

Unfortunately, despite the clear benefits that these programs bring to the table, they were vetoed as pawns in an unfortunate and tragic chess game of who gets the final say on the State Budget. Perhaps there was no animus against Agriculture specifically since many non-agricultural programs such as Corrections were vetoed too. Perhaps the veto was simply "doing the numbers" and alphabetically, agriculture came first. It is not for me to say. However, PA Agriculture is the collateral damage in the Budget Impasse.

Remember that collateral damage is another term for road kill.

Please consider:

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania Agriculture is a leading job creator and a huge economic engine for Pennsylvania and it should not – and must not – be sacrificed in the name of expediency.

