

TO: Members, House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees

FROM: Adrienne Hodson, Government Relations Associate

DATE: March 15, 2016

RE: **CCAP Comments on Budget Impasse Impacts on Extension Programs**

On behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), I want to thank Chairman Causer, Chairman Carroll, Chairman Vogel, Chairwoman Schwank and members of the House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees for the opportunity to offer comments on the impacts that the budget impasse has had on agriculture. The CCAP is a non-profit, non-partisan association providing legislative and regulatory representation, education, research, insurance, technology, and other services on behalf of all of the commonwealth's 67 counties.

Counties play an integral role in the commonwealth's agriculture community and administer several important programs to help maintain the industry's viability. Counties partner with the Pennsylvania State University Extension program, which is a university-county partnership designed to provide all Pennsylvania communities access to the University's resources. Extension helps to ensure the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania's natural resources and promotes a strong agriculture and food system in the commonwealth. Beyond agricultural education, Extension offers programs and training on community and economic development, civic engagement, and many other areas. Many counties provide funding or staffing for their local Extension programs, or in-kind services such as office space.

A few years ago, the Penn State Extension program transitioned to a district model, which consolidated administrative services at a multi-county level while continuing to provide support to all 67 counties. Funding for Penn State Extension programs has traditionally been a university-county partnership, with funds coming from the state and counties. A number of years ago, in FY 2011-2012, the funding provided by the commonwealth for Extension services was split out of Penn State University's funding and transferred to the Department of Agriculture as part of the Ag College Land Script line item. This transfer was also accompanied by a funding cut of 19 percent. In the intervening years, the program saw modest 3 percent increase in FY 2013-2014 and then was level funded in FY 2014-2015. Most recently, in December, the Ag College Land Script Fund was line-item vetoed to zero for FY 2015-2016. Well before the line-item veto, funding levels for Extension were already below historical levels.

While every single county across the commonwealth values Penn State Extension, counties must make hard budget decisions inasmuch as the great majority of county services are mandated by the state. Counties have experienced a number of impacts resulting from the budget impasse and many are considering contingency plans in case an impasse occurs again. Counties are not required to provide funding to Penn State Extension, and do so because they see value in the program. However, it remains unclear how many counties, regardless of how much they value and support Extension, would be able to provide funding to fill the gap for the programs it provides in the absence of state funding.

County Extension offices have felt a large impact from the budget impasse and line-item veto. Some of the specific impacts are:

- A freeze has been imposed on filling any vacant positions, including District Food Safety positions as well as Sustainable Agriculture Educators
- All Extension employees are under a new travel policy that significantly impacts the ability to travel
- The 2016 Extension conference, filled with educational opportunities and courses, has been canceled
- March and June Extension leadership team meetings, which are attended by all District Directors and University Extension Leadership for the purpose of sharing and being briefed on topics necessary for Directors to perform their duties, have been canceled
- Necessary replacement of equipment has been halted.
- Staff are worried about their job security and the morale is at an all-time low

Counties hope a resolution to the budget impasse, and a complete and adequate FY 2015-2016 budget, is near. We appreciate the committee's interest in examining the budget impasse impacts on agriculture and look forward to working with you moving forward.