



Testimony

Senate and House Agriculture and Rural Affairs  
Committees  
Regarding Agriculture Funding for the 2015-16  
Fiscal Year

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Offered by  
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Good morning Chairman Vogel, Chairman Causer, Democrat Chairs Schwank and Carroll, and members of the Senate and House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the impact of partial agriculture funding for the current fiscal year on our farm families. As you know, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is the largest general farm organization in the state with over 61,400 family members.

I first want to thank you as committee members and the legislature in general for your many years of support in regards to budget priorities impacting agriculture in the state. There have been many occasions under both Republican and Democrat administrations that the legislature has had the burden of securing sufficient funds through bipartisan efforts for the vital programs being discussed here today. So thank you, and we remain hopeful that bipartisan efforts will be made again this year to avert the crisis we face as the result of an incomplete budget. However, as you all well know, time is running out quickly in some key priority areas.

What makes the current budget crisis for agriculture so unique this year is, after eight months of an unresolved budget for the current fiscal year, we are faced with the impending closure of 67 county Extension services and several research laboratories across Pennsylvania. Avoiding this unthinkable tragedy to our agricultural infrastructure is Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's number one priority! It is unimaginable to the ag community that Pennsylvania would become the first state in the Nation to sever its tie with the 160 year-old land-grant mission in light of all the good it has brought to the state in not only the agricultural sector, but to rural and even urban communities. Even the current threat of such an outcome is doing great harm to the future viability of not only Extension and research services but the College of Agricultural Sciences as well. If the threat becomes reality, the damage will be irreparable and the ag community understands the long-term impact.

I personally have benefitted from the College of Agricultural Sciences Extension and research programs throughout my past life as a farmer where I served on the Franklin County Extension Board of Directors, and I currently serve on the Cumberland County Extension Board of Directors. At my request, Dave Swartz, the District Director for Cumberland, Perry and Dauphin counties supplied me with some information to quantify the amount of outreach and impact Extension services have provided in these counties in the past year. I want to take just a few minutes to relate some of what was provided to me.

In regards to outreach to production agriculture, a professional pest manager's school was held in Dauphin County attended by 382 people from 15 different counties to obtain training for specialized sections of restricted pesticide license applications that is uniquely provided by Penn State Extension. A separate training was held in Lancaster County attend by 327 people. Pesticide recertification for 64 commercial vegetable growers mostly from Cumberland County was held in that county. The Keystone Crops and Soils Conference was held in Dauphin County with 100 attendees. Perry County Crops Day reached 150 farmers from that county. PA Soybean Congress was held in Dauphin County with 150 attendees. Dauphin County pesticide

training meeting had 125 attendees. County Extension educators in that three county district reached 580 attendees at agri-business sponsored events and another 262 at Penn State sponsored events over the winter months. All these meetings are essential to training and educating farmers to the latest in research and technology to farm more efficiently while protecting environmental resources and providing the consumer with a safe and locally grown food supply.

At the request of the Cumberland Area Economic Development Corporation, Penn State Extension completed an extensive analysis of the Cumberland County Economy. The study included shift share analysis, as well as other traditional parameters of economic growth and vitality. The Economic Development Corporation used this study as the foundation of their new economic development plan in the county, and the industries targeted for retention and attraction are a direct result of opportunities identified in the study.

In the dairy sector, Extension services in the district held face to face meetings through formal workshops and personal farm evaluations with over 570 dairy farmers to help them manage the huge challenges of remaining profitable and viable during these challenging times. The Penn State Extension Dairy Team hosted three major events in the district that attracted over 800 local, national and international participants. In 2015, the two Dairy Business Management educators based in Cumberland County conducted 150 farm visits alone. Statewide, a USDA funded grant project reached over 2,300 dairy farmers through the Penn State Extension service. In 2013-14, the Penn State Extension Dairy Team directly impacted over a \$100 million in milk production working with 224 dairy producers to improve the management and health of nearly 23,000 cows producing over 500 million pounds of milk.

Outside of agriculture, the Cumberland/Perry County Master Gardner Program reached 2,700 people through classes and workshops and another nearly 1,100 people received help with home garden and horticultural concerns through contacts with Extension.

The 4-H program in the three county district has nearly 1,400 youth members. In addition to that number, county extension offices in the district provided education in ag literacy to over 8,400 youth.

These numbers reflect one district made up of three counties. You need to multiply these numbers many times over to gain some perspective of the amount of outreach that is provided through county Extension services across the state on a daily basis. This also doesn't account for the thousands of contacts made with online resources provided by Penn State Extension and research services.

Many of us in the room today saw firsthand last week the overwhelming support from the 4H kids who filled the rotundas and the hearing room. The quality of those developing young leaders and the passion they hold for preserving their program was certainly very moving to me personally and I believe to many others as well. Not every kid excels in sports or finds other

school activities that fits their niche. 4H helps young people learn responsibility, hard work and tenacity—the types of strengths that need to be instilled in our future leaders.

Pennsylvania's agricultural industry cannot afford to be without the fulfillment of our land-grant partnership between federal, state and local government to provide Penn State Extension and research services. Food Safety Modernization Act implementation, compliance with water quality standards through BMPs on our farms and the impending avian flu epidemic are just three key areas of concern that Extension is playing a vital role today in preserving our industry in this state, while addressing vital concerns of food safety and security and environmental stewardship for all Pennsylvania citizens.

If we allow the lack of adequate funding to eliminate Extension and research services and the ability to communicate the wealth of information those services can provide, it will come at great cost to the future of agriculture in our state, the future of leadership development in our youth and to every citizen concerned about the disease or insect that is impacting their lawn and garden or the safety and quality of the food they eat. Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences and the land-grant mission lives in our Extension and research services and we need to keep it vital and growing!

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has always held adequate funding for Pennsylvania's Animal Health Commission and the diagnostic labs as a priority issue as well. Adequate funding for Pennsylvania's nationally recognized program in protecting animal and human health, and food safety implemented under PDA's Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission (AHDC) and Pennsylvania Animal Health and Diagnostic Laboratories (PADLS) is absolutely essential.

The AHDC provides education and prevention strategies in addition to the lab diagnostic services and immediate control measures in the event of an animal disease outbreak, and have been instrumental in saving the agricultural industry and general public millions of dollars by the prevention and control of disease outbreaks. Lack of funding for these lines will place animal agriculture in jeopardy and Pennsylvanians at risk for zoonotic disease, foodborne illness, and reduced food security. In recent years, these lines have been funded through the Race Horse Development Fund and Farm Bureau supports continuation of utilization of these funds for agricultural priorities such as this.

I have heard references in recent weeks within the Capitol building from both elected and appointed officials to the effect of seeing programs such as Penn State Extension suffer from the uncompleted budget process as being comparable to watching one of your children suffer, and the difficulty of choosing to save one child over another without a complete and comprehensive budget. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau also desires a complete and comprehensive budget that adequately addresses priorities discussed here today as well as others within the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. However, we believe Penn State Extension and research and diagnostic labs are unique in that once the jobs are lost, and the lights are turned off, the damage

is irreparable. With no sign of a comprehensive budget agreement in sight, we do believe special action needs to be taken to avoid decimation of Penn State Extension and research programs and our diagnostic laboratories.

Thank you for your consideration of these priority issues in need of urgent action and we look forward to working with you all to achieve bipartisan resolve.