



Joint Senate and House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
Testimony of
Secretary Russell C. Redding, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
August 14, 2019

Good morning Chairman Vogel, Chairwoman Schwank, Chairman Causer, Chairman Pashinski, and distinguished members of the Senate and House Agriculture and Rural Affairs committees. Thank you for the invitation to provide an update on animal agriculture in Pennsylvania. Ag Progress Days is an ideal backdrop to celebrate the commonwealth's successes and opportunities, to educate and inform, and to discuss collectively the challenges we face, and work towards solutions.

From bicentennial dairy farms to state of the art poultry farms, Pennsylvania touts a full spectrum of what animal agriculture means and what it looks like. The commonwealth, from its earliest days, has been a leader in animal agriculture, and we want to continue to be one.

The economic impact study conducted by Temple University's Fox School of Business showed us very clearly the resounding impact animal agriculture has on our economy. The study included strategic recommendations that highlighted opportunities for growth in animal agriculture and identified areas of change or potential threat in order to make improvements. In 2017, Pennsylvania was home to nearly \$5 billion in sales of livestock and livestock products. This outstanding figure is achieved through many factors, including our insistence that healthy livestock be the foundation of a safe food supply. Pennsylvania places animal health as a top priority for the safety of consumers who depend on a secure food supply, and the commonwealth's reputation for quality is outpaced only by consumer demand for local products.

Our focus on animal health and the results of the economic impact study led to Governor Wolf's six-point plan to strengthen Pennsylvania's agriculture industry, which included a particular focus on creating more processing capabilities to accommodate a growing animal agriculture sector and supporting the high demand for organic feed grains to serve a growing organic livestock industry. With the passage of the **Pennsylvania Farm Bill**, the Governor's vision is reality and includes many new resources to safeguard and promote animal agriculture.

The **Pennsylvania Dairy Investment Program** was established in law to provide \$5 million in funding for research and development, organic transition assistance, value-added processing, and marketing grants in support of Pennsylvania's dairy industry.

The **Very Small Meat Processor Grant Program** provided \$500,000 to incentivize access to meat processing inspections, encouraging access to new and expanded markets for small or new producers by reimbursing federal meat inspection costs and subsidizing the first-time purchase of equipment needed for federal compliance.

The Farm Bill invested an additional \$6 million to support conservation efforts, including best management practices for livestock producers to help ensure that animal agriculture can continue to thrive while responsibly managing its environmental impact. The **Conservation Excellence Grant Program**, funded at \$2.5 million, provides financial and technical assistance to farmers to install and implement best management practices. The **Agriculture Linked Investment Program**, funded at \$500,000, re-

establishes this low interest loan program for the implementation of best management practices. The funds are expected to leverage \$3-\$4 million in low-interest loans that will be made available through this program. The **Resource Enhancement and Protection Tax Credits**, expanded by \$3 million, increases the lifetime cap and while ensuring availability where it is most needed. In total, the PA Farm Bill is expected to leverage \$9-\$10 million in new and expanded funds to be administered by the State Conservation Commission. These funds build on the efforts of Pennsylvania farmers to protect Pennsylvania waterways and increase soil health throughout the Commonwealth.

The **Pennsylvania Rapid Response Disaster Readiness Account**, funded at \$4 million, was designed to allow for a quick response to agricultural disasters, including utilizing animal or plant health officials to contain an outbreak or threat, such as Avian Influenza. The legislation created a new account and an innovative funding mechanism in response to lessons learned from the threat of Avian Influenza and the invasion of the Spotted Lanternfly. If the Department had access to funds in 2014 when the first Spotted Lanternfly was discovered, we would be in a very different position today. We have created the fund and the mechanism to release funds in the case of a disaster. This fund will give us the ability to react swiftly – the question is not if there will be another disaster, but when.

The **Center for Animal Agriculture Excellence**, funded at \$1 million, supports the animal agriculture industry by expanding processing capacity, technical assistance, providing resources for food safety compliance, and assisting with the establishment of hemp as an approved animal feed. The Department expects the newly established Center for Animal Agriculture Excellence to also focus on on-farm biosecurity initiatives to further safeguard Pennsylvania's animal agriculture future.

The Pennsylvania Farm Bill broadens and enriches the Department's hard work to support animal agriculture throughout the commonwealth, providing resources, guidance, and best practices for producers whether they're located in Bucks or Butler. The Department is steadfast in its mission of increasing the education of and engagement in on-farm biosecurity practices through the Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services (BAHDS) and strong partnerships with industry, universities, stakeholders, and research facilities.

The Department's Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services is responsible for controlling and eradicating diseases in livestock and poultry. This mission is critical since these diseases have the potential to impact human health and cause significant economic loss to farmers and the commonwealth. In addition, BAHDS administers regulatory programs for animal health certification, containment of diseased animals and elimination of disease agents.

With millions of livestock and poultry in Pennsylvania, BAHDS has a presence throughout the state with Veterinary Medical Field Officers and Domestic Animal Health Inspectors headquartered across seven regions. These 89 staff members work closely with the farming and non-farming public on issues ranging from suspected rabies cases to farm-based animal health questions.

The work performed everyday by BAHDS is essential to protecting U.S. livestock and poultry industries from foreign animal diseases, which, in turn, protects our food supply and our citizens. Maintaining a healthy animal agriculture industry is also a key step to ensuring Pennsylvania's trade status with other states and nations is not negatively impacted by an outbreak within our borders.

Safeguarding the health of Pennsylvania's animals, people, and the environment they share is a monumental task, complete with complex, intertwined, and inseparable challenges. How effectively state government addresses these challenges depends on how well we forge like-minded partnerships and seize opportunities to work together toward that common goal.

BAHDS works closely with the Department's Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission (AHDC), which was established in 1988 to facilitate an integrated approach to the diagnosis and investigation of disease in farm animals. AHDC was designed to ensure robust diagnostic capabilities in Pennsylvania because the state is one of the top animal-producing states in the country, especially in the dairy and poultry sectors. ADHC has resources and a cadre of specialists to allow planned interventions in disease outbreaks rather than merely crisis interventions.

The Department and AHDC's partnerships with the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine (PennVet) and the Penn State University College of Agriculture multiply our effectiveness, broadening the scope of our work far beyond what each could do individually.

The Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System (PADLS) is a key element of that partnership. This tri-partite animal health laboratory system connects the Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory (PVL) in Harrisburg, Penn State University's Animal Diagnostic Laboratory (ADL) and the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine's New Bolton Center to provide laboratory testing, field-based monitoring and producer outreach, all with a focus on protecting our citizens, our food supply and our animal agriculture industry.

The system's three labs and their staffs of nationally respected scientists and technicians each play a distinct role in protecting Pennsylvania's food supply and public health, while decreasing environmental impact. PVL's regulatory diagnostics combine with the virology diagnostics of Penn State's ADL and the toxicology research at PennVet's New Bolton Center to form one of the most effective biosecurity teams in the country.

The PADLS labs have come together to work for Pennsylvania's farmers, consumers, and the nation to ensure a secure and healthy food supply. As a former dairy farmer, I know how important it can be to get results fast from necropsies, blood samples, fecal samples and more. The PADLS system helps agriculturalists quickly find the answers so they can take appropriate action for their operation or best advise their clients. This system helps them meet the challenges as they seek opportunities to increase productivity, decrease inputs, and lessen our environmental impact, all while feeding a growing population.

Since Pennsylvania's agriculture industry is an economic powerhouse, we must continue to protect the industry and uphold the high standards of quality. With the spread of new threats, such as African Swine Fever, the Department must utilize all of the tools available to remain vigilant. Through the Pennsylvania Farm Bill, the PADLS system, and the expertise and knowledge of stakeholders and researchers, we are primed for success. By engaging these valuable partners, we can address biosecurity across the commonwealth and continue to be vigilant and proactive in addressing threats. I look forward to continuing to work together to protect and provide for Pennsylvania.

Thank you.

Russell C. Redding
Secretary of Agriculture