

**DENNIS C WOLFF, SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SENATE RECONFIRMATION HEARING
MARCH 13 2007
OPENING STATEMENT**

Chairman Brubaker and Chairman O’Pake, distinguished Members of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to stand before you today to discuss Governor Rendell’s request for my nomination as Secretary of Agriculture for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Agriculture is our state’s number one industry. Our 58,000 farm families work hard to provide food and fiber for citizens of the Commonwealth and people across the globe. The staff at the Department of Agriculture work equally hard to help promote the industry, support our producers, and ensure consumer protection. I am proud to work with the Department’s dedicated staff, and we all are privileged to and strive for, growing Pennsylvania through the programs and vision of Governor Rendell.

Governor Rendell’s top priority has been to ensure that Pennsylvania agriculture continues to function as a leading economic enterprise in Pennsylvania—an enterprise that, through jobs and value-added opportunities, stimulates local economies, provides for our citizens and still allows us to export nearly \$1 billion in agricultural products. We have worked hard to focus on our energies towards accomplishing that mission, and I believe we have been successful in our efforts to date.

Since I came to the Department, we have helped improve state, regional and national agricultural policies, explored new and exciting markets such as renewable energy, and implemented state-of-the-art technology to give our staff the support they need. I am proud to say that the future of Pennsylvania agriculture is bright – both for our farmers who contribute more than \$45 billion to our economy, and for consumers, who will continue to enjoy one of the world’s safest and most affordable food supplies. I look forward to our future success, and to continuing my work as Secretary of Agriculture.

It has been my honor to serve our state’s leading industry for the last four years, and I ask today for your support so I may continue to serve, protect and promote Pennsylvania agriculture, our family farms and agribusinesses for the next four years.

I wanted to take a brief opportunity to highlight some of the Department of Agriculture’s accomplishments during the last four years. They include:

- Added twenty-two full-time inspectors and staff to the Department of Agriculture’s weights and measures program to better protect consumers and businesses against inaccuracies in devices that weigh and dispense fuel.
- Invested \$3 million for agricultural research to address consumer protection issues such as avian influenza, bio-security, Plum Pox Virus, nutrient management, and to develop

best management practices to help improve profitability for farmers and agricultural producers.

- Developed the PA Preferred Health Vending Initiative which encourages students to develop healthy eating habits by partnering with schools to offer vending machines stocked with nutritious PA Preferred products.
- Developed the Healthy Beverage Tool Kit, a step-by-step resource for school boards, teachers, school foodservice professionals, parents and other interested groups to implement healthy beverages, like milk, 100-percent fruit juices and water.
- Took steps to protect consumers, reputable breeders and kennels, and dogs by appointing a Special Deputy Secretary for Dog Law Enforcement, and hired a Special Dog Law Prosecutor and a special enforcement team comprised of four kennel compliance specialists, who will be dispatched throughout the state to enforce the kennel provisions of the dog law.
- Opened Pennsylvania's first new harness track in 41 years, Harrah's Chester Casino and Racetrack in Chester, representing a major advancement for the state's agricultural industry and economy.
- Developed, through the Governor's Invasive Species Council, the first Invasive Species Management Plan for Pennsylvania.
- Certified over 700 manure haulers and brokers through the Manure Hauler and Broker Program, and worked with the Nutrient Management Advisory Board and State Conservation Commission to promulgate the program's regulations.

Economic Development

- Launched PAGrows, a one-stop shop for all financing needs for agricultural producers, agricultural processors, farmers' markets and agribusinesses to expand, sustain or diversify their operation(s) through personal and technical consultations.
- Provided over 110 First Industries Fund grants and loans, valued at \$23 million and leveraging \$73.5 million in private sector agricultural investments.

Dairy Industry

- Increased production per cow by 1500 pounds per cow which equates to \$150 more profit per cow, and grew total production by over 208 million pounds.
- Petitioned the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board to use its authority to collect premiums in other marketing areas.
- Ratified a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commissioners/Secretaries of Agriculture from New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont that, for the first time, established a formal relationship to work cooperatively to enhance the dairy industry throughout the region.
- Established a Northeast Dairy Leadership Team to provide the leadership goals and direction for the Northeast Dairy Industry. Northeast will become more competitive in the marketplaces and more profitable for individual dairy farmers.
- Expanded the Profit Team Program to over 100 farms. The pilot farms experienced growth averages of 16.7% in milk production per cow, 7.2% increase in cow numbers, and total milk production increases of 24.9%. Average profit improvement was \$249 per cow.

- Implemented DART (Dairy Advocacy and Resource Teams), which utilizes the many Agri-business professionals routinely visiting dairy farms, to positively influence the attitude, communication, and outlook of the industry, while stimulating a stronger business management and farm profitability focus.
- Remodeled and opened “Capital Dairy”, a business incubator project aimed at helping the next generation of young dairy farmers to get started.
- Developed Recommendations for Dairy Reform for the 2007 Farm Bill.
- Filed an Amicus Brief in support of the Make Allowance lawsuit.

Market Development

- Protected farmers’ interests through crop insurance with over 15,000 policies in force with a total of \$300 million of protection in force. The commonwealth has the only state-owned crop insurance product, AGR-Lite, in the nation. 28 other states now offer AGR-Lite under the ownership and oversight of Pennsylvania.
- Grew the PA Preferred Program to nearly 2000 participants.
- Conducted several food promotions throughout the year, including the PA Preferred Best Chef of Pennsylvania.
- Launched a PA Preferred advertising campaign that included billboards placed in three major market areas of the state, commercials aired on the Food Network, Style, DIY, and HG-TV.
- Hosted Chinese delegates to discuss hardwood trade opportunities and showcase American lumber.

Farmland Preservation

- Invested over \$65 million in Growing Greener II funds in farmland preservation projects across the state.
- Total state investment in 2006 was over \$100 million, the largest single year investment in farmland preservation since program inception.
- Pennsylvania has secured a total of 3,095 farms and 349,122 acres in 53 of the 67 counties—both national records.

Consumer Protection: Animal Health and Food Safety

- Placed more than 30,000 Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) ear tags in Pennsylvania cattle, enabling the agency to respond rapidly to contain disease outbreaks.
- Began development of an age-source verified program for Pennsylvania’s cattle industry.
- PAHERDS won the American Council of Technology Award for Innovation In Government.
- Developed a new PA Laboratory Information Management System (PALIMBS) to link all three Commonwealth Animal Health Laboratories.
- Developed the PA DOGS computer program for more efficient capturing and recording of dog licensing and kennel inspection data.
- Developed PA Plants to streamline operations in the Bureau of Plant Industry.
- Launched the PAFARMS initiative, a joint premise identification project that utilizes Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to assist PDA in effectively managing animal emergency situations.

- Conducted more than 240,000 inspections of live bird markets and related industries.
- Conducted more than 5,000 Chronic Wasting Disease tests in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Game Commission.
- Invested \$600,000 to replace an antiquated food inspection process with a new web-based system that gives consumers online access to food inspection reports.

Center for Farm Transitions

- Provided information, referrals and consultations to over 147 agricultural producers.
- Provided a day long workshop in Bradford County for 80 farmers on succession, estate and business expansion planning.
- Created a working relationship with the Penn State Dickinson Ag Law Center, providing agricultural information and resources to attorneys in PA.

Renewable Energy:

- Provided networking opportunities and information sharing with over 130 biofuels, solar, wind, biomass and biogas operations, companies and individuals.
- Supported the creation and administration of the Governor's Renewable Ag Energy Council.
- Hosted renewable energy education forums at Ag Progress Days, Farm Show and at expositions in York, Wayne and Fayette counties.
- Worked to secure Net Metering regulations, providing for enhanced opportunities for self-generation of power on farms.
- Endorsed and promoted the 25 X 25 initiative, which aims to achieve 25% dependency on renewable fuels by 2025.
- Worked with the Governor and Secretary McGinty to develop the Penn Security Fuels Initiative to replace a billion gallons of petroleum fuels with renewable bio-fuels by the year 2017.

Ag Education Initiative

- Funded and facilitated the start up of a credentialed veterinary assistant curriculum at Dauphin County Technical School, a first such program in the nation to have credentials issued by a veterinary medical association.
- Developed and distributed five major curriculum projects to Commonwealth school systems.
- Worked to better prepare the state's high school students for careers in the food and agriculture industries through a joint program to promote agricultural business degrees between the state Department of Agriculture, Harrisburg Area Community College, Saint Joseph's University and the food industry.
- \$110,000 was distributed to Ag and Rural Youth organizations for educational projects.

The Governor's agricultural priorities for 2007 and beyond will build upon our past successes and improve the quality of life for Pennsylvania farm families. Our 2007 priorities for agriculture include:

1. Continue to focus on improved farm profitability by supporting and developing:
 - A. Center for Dairy Excellence
 - B. Center for Fruit Excellence
 - C. PA Grows- the delivery system for the first industries fund
 - D. PA Preferred
 - E. The Ag Renewable Energy Council
 - F. Livestock Protection Program
2. Keep PA's topsoil in agriculture by supporting and building on:
 - A. Farmland Preservation
 - B. Center for Farm Transition
3. Educate the public about the importance of Agriculture to Pennsylvania and improve co-existence issues through:
 - A. Marketplace for the mind
 - B. ACRE
4. Develop and promote reform recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill.
5. Protect Agriculture and the public by operating a modern surveillance and lab system including BSL 3 capacity to conduct veterinary services and programming on animal diseases and bioterrorism incidences.
6. Strengthen PA agriculture by developing regional initiatives that help sustain the infrastructure vital to our farmers.
7. Improve Dog Law by restructuring the bureau and through new dog law regulations.
8. Encourage and support conservation practices like no till farming, nutrient management and other conservation stewardship programs.
9. Deliver healthy PA Preferred products to the schools in PA with the PA Preferred Healthy Vending Initiative.
10. Work to improve consumer protection efforts in food safety and weight and measures programs.
11. Work to develop and support Governor Rendell's Energy Independence initiative.