

**Statement of
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Before the Joint Hearing of
Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Labor & Industry Committees
October 23, 2007**

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Brubaker, Chairman O'Pake, Chairman Gordner, Chairwoman Tartaglione, and members of the Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Labor & Industry committees for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss what the Department of Labor & Industry is doing to help meet the workforce development needs and demands of the Agriculture Industry.

Just as a key portion of the Department of Labor & Industry's mission is to improve the quality of life and economic security for Pennsylvania workers and businesses, workforce development has always played a key role in Governor Rendell's plan to revitalize, strengthen and expand Pennsylvania's economy. When he took office, the Governor charged the Department of Labor & Industry with developing and implementing an industry-driven strategy to workforce development that focused on the industries and occupations that presented the most opportunities for labor force and economic growth.

Through our analysis of labor market information data from local clusters, and employer feedback, we identified nine targeted industry clusters that presented us with the best opportunities to remain competitive in the global economy, while creating an increasing number of good paying jobs: Agriculture and Food Production was one of those industry clusters.

Agriculture and Food Production has historically been an integral part of Pennsylvania's economy. According to the US Department of Agriculture Statistics Service, Agriculture Production in Pennsylvania generates over \$4 billion annually in cash receipts. In fact, Pennsylvania ranks second among states in the dollar value of agricultural products sold for human consumption.

And it is projected to continue its growth, forcing us to look at new and innovative ways to meet the workforce demands of this truly unique industry.

At Labor & Industry, our involvement with the Agriculture industry happens on two levels – through our workforce development training and education programs, including programs such as the Industry Partnership involving the Pennsylvania Dairy Board and the Lancaster Workforce Investment Board previously referenced in Secretary Wolff's testimony; and through the Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership's Special Programs Division.

Just as the Governor and Secretary Wolff have aimed to change the image of the Agriculture industry, the same has happened in terms of workforce development through the Department of Labor & Industry. One of the results of that more aggressive, flexible approach is Industry Partnerships – a key innovation for meeting the skills needs of businesses, the career goals of workers, and the economic development goals of the commonwealth.

More specifically, Industry Partnerships serve as a particular kind of “workforce intermediary” - a dual-customer institution that helps connect and meet the needs of both workers and businesses. Industry Partnerships bring together multiple employers, and workers or worker representatives when appropriate, in the same industry cluster to address common or overlapping human capital needs.

There are 90 active Industry Partnerships in Pennsylvania, consisting of more than 5,700 employers, and with more than 24,000 employees having either completed or currently receiving advanced skills training. Employees who received training under this initiative have received an average increase in their wages of 12.89 percent.

Of those 90 partnerships, six are focused solely on the Agriculture and Food Production industry. These Partnerships represent 214 companies, and 1,852 employees trained. Employees involved in these worker-training programs for Agriculture and Food Production saw increases in their salaries of 10.24 percent and 12.83 percent, respectively.

All of the Industry Partnerships are funded by state dollars that have been legislatively appropriated since 2005. We are able to tout this type of success because of the Legislature’s support of these proven economic and workforce development programs.

An example of the common type of success that we’ve seen in our Partnerships is the Consortium for Agriculture Producers in Lancaster County. This particular Industry Partnership is sponsored by the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board, in collaboration with the Lancaster County Blue Ribbon Commission on Agriculture, the Lancaster Chamber of Business, and Cooperative Extension Services Inc. The Partnership is in place to aid the dairy and poultry industries in the development of agribusiness educational programs. Initial training for dairy herdsmen focuses on dairy farm reproduction skills, techniques and protocols; dairy farm business evaluation skills and techniques; and cow care and value. To date, nearly \$260,000 of state funds have been invested in this program with an additional \$230,000 invested by the 100 businesses involved in the Partnership resulting in the training of nearly 300 workers.

There is an abundance of job opportunities that exists in the Agriculture Industry with many requiring on-the-job training and requiring minimal experience. However, the reality still exists that there are some jobs that do not require high-skill labor, yet consist of very labor-intensive work. These types of jobs are hard to fill on a consistent basis with domestic employment. This forces employers to look to migrant workers or alien labor.

Understanding this fact, the Department of Labor & Industry’s Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership in cooperation with Pennsylvania CareerLinks administers a US Department of Labor program designed to address this need on the state level. The H-2A

Temporary Agricultural Program establishes a means for agricultural employers who anticipate a shortage of domestic workers to bring nonimmigrant foreign workers to the U.S. to perform agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature. Before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) can approve an employer's petition for such workers, the employer must file an application with the Department stating that there are not sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified, and available, and that the employment of aliens will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. The statute and Departmental regulations provide for numerous worker protections and employer requirements with respect to wages and working conditions that do not apply to nonagricultural programs.

Employers must actively recruit US workers independently and in cooperation with the PA CareerLink. Employers can accomplish this by:

- Advertising in a newspaper and on the radio; and
- Having the CareerLink enter the job order into the Interstate Clearance System.

Employers must submit a recruitment report to the US Department of Labor and the Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership detailing their recruitment efforts, complete with results and copies of the tear sheets of the newspaper advertisements and receipt for the radio advertisement.

The US Department of Labor will then send a letter of certification to the employer that is attached to the US Center for Immigration Services (USCIS) visa application. This allows them to begin the nonimmigrant foreign worker recruitment. Meanwhile, the PA CareerLink job order will stay active for 50 percent of the duration of the job. During that time, the employer must hire any qualified US workers who apply.

For the years 2004 through 2007, Pennsylvania has received the following number of H-2A applications from Pennsylvania employers:

- 2004 – 17 orders (152 workers)
- 2005 – 29 orders (217 workers)
- 2006 – 33 orders (294 workers)
- 2007 – 45 orders to date (391 workers)

Workforce Development in Pennsylvania has significantly improved over the past five years, and we have been able to implement a more flexible strategy that is truly responsive to the needs and demands of the ever-changing global economy. Our efforts have translated into success for those businesses willing to invest in their economic futures to keep pace with the competition. As you have heard – and will hear throughout today's hearing – the face of the Agricultural industry is changing, but there are some issues and challenges that remain constant. The Department of Labor & Industry is, and will remain, dedicated to helping our businesses meet these challenges in ways that protect, preserve and positively contribute to the well-being of our workers and economy.