

Testimony
Russell C. Redding, Acting Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee
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Good morning Chairman Brubaker, Chairman O'Pake and distinguished members of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. Senator Alloway, thank you for the kind introduction, your vote of confidence and your commitment to public service.

Three months ago, Governor Rendell nominated me to serve the Commonwealth and its leading industry as the Secretary of Agriculture. I would like to take a moment to thank Governor Rendell for this privilege. I am humbled by the faith that he has shown in me and appreciate the support he has given to Pennsylvania agriculture. Over the past seven years the Rendell administration, working with this Committee, has provided farmers access to new financial streams, created a system to address problem ordinances restricting agriculture, provided incentives to conserve our natural resources, strengthened our charitable food system, increased the quality of life for dogs and led conversations at the highest levels of government about how to structure farm policy and initiatives. These are accomplishments we can all be proud of.

For the past 15 years I have had the pleasure of working each day with some of the best public servants both elected and appointed this state has known, beginning with former Secretary Dennis Wolff. This experience confirmed for me that the achievements of the Pennsylvania agriculture industry are a reflection of the great work done by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture staff and the more than 63,000 farms and the thousands of related agricultural businesses that we serve. The Department of Agriculture has a very unique mission that spans animal health, food production, environmental protection, consumer protection, workforce development and economic development. While it is extremely meaningful to me to have the opportunity to sit here before you today and to serve as the lead advocate for Pennsylvania agriculture, I represent just one of the hundreds of committed PDA staff and thousands of friends of agriculture who are keeping Pennsylvania growing.

Our agriculture industry faces many opportunities and its fair share of challenges right now, but the right team is in place to lead the Department as we engage in our mission of encouraging, protecting and promoting agriculture and its related industries while providing consumer protection through inspection services that impact the health and financial security of Pennsylvania's citizens. I am proud of the work done by the Department and its leadership team, and value deeply their efforts and good thinking.

In the past three months I have crossed the state a few times to participate in different industry events. These trips have been invaluable because they demonstrate daily the diversity of agriculture in our state. Mushroom meetings in Chester County; a dairy industry meeting in Butler County; the grape harvest in Erie; the Rural Electric leadership meeting in Harrisburg, the celebration of Plum Pox Virus eradication in Adams County; an FFA Pep Rally with 500 students in Philadelphia; celebrating World Food Day with our partners in the charitable food system; hearings on the Hill in DC and here at the Capitol; and our first ever Farm-City Day event at City Hall in Philadelphia all reminded me of the many and varied expectations placed on this agency. In some cases, I have only

had to cross Cameron Street to experience the best livestock shows in the world. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture shows up in a lot of different places and in many different forms, but our work touches the lives of each and every citizen.

Understanding the impact that our work has on the state and our fellow Pennsylvanians, it is important that this Department have clear objectives and a strong blueprint moving forward. Just as the last leg of a relay race must be the strongest to achieve success, my team and I must redouble our efforts to ensure that Pennsylvania agriculture benefits from the last full measure of effort that we can give to it. We have both an agenda and a sense of urgency that helps drive us forward each and every day.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that the Department itself looks a little bit different today than it did this time last year. I want to share with you that we have been able to secure the resources needed to protect our core mission and fully engage in the objectives we have set forth. We have been stressed and we have been required to think in a broader scope than ever before, but our core mission has not been compromised.

As we move forward, there are six objectives that we have laid out for the coming months:

- 1) Ensure that all of agriculture has a friend in the Department and realizes the benefits of strong relationships with consumers. The work that we do is size neutral and production practice neutral, making it imperative that we help connect with all of those who choose to be a part of the agriculture community. Whether you are farming in an open field or in the shadow of skyscrapers, you have an advocate in this agency.
- 2) Enhance food safety in Pennsylvania not only by increasing the efficiency of the Department's mandated duties, but through initiatives such as the Governor's Food Safety Council and by working with the private sector as well as federal officials and legislators.
- 3) Expand our environmental stewardship efforts by continuing our leadership on farmland preservation; making full use of the Farm Bill authority for conservation; working to address the needs of the Chesapeake Bay; and exploring/creating ways that farmers and society can benefit from the intersection of these important efforts.
- 4) Provide those Pennsylvanians who are at-risk for hunger with the supplemental nutrition they need by making access to food as financially and logistically efficient as possible for our many local partners in the state's charitable food system.
- 5) Strengthen the Department's connection to its sister agencies and related state and local partners to ensure that agriculture's role in economic development, education and workforce development are reflective of the important role this industry plays in communities across Pennsylvania.
- 6) Redouble efforts to anchor the existing initiatives of the Department so that they can benefit future generations of producers and consumers. This includes the PA Preferred branding program, the Center for Dairy Excellence, Center for Beef Excellence, Center for Farm Transitions and the extensive information technology investments made to provide better management tools to the Department and increased transparency to citizens.

Many of you are familiar with the six points listed above from our time together during the confirmation process. I want to say thank you to the members of the Senate for their time and their insight. There is great value in the confirmation process and these visits, as they allowed us to discuss the many opportunities and concerns that exist across the state. I found these conversations helpful, as they highlighted where the Department interacts with our citizens and how we can help

them in the future. I appreciate your time and the insight that you shared with me during these meetings, and I know that they will help me do a better job of being Secretary.

Over the past three months, I have learned that the state is a lot bigger than you think. I've had time to reflect on where we've been – such as the formation of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture in 1895 and the key agricultural issues more than 114 years ago. I've had the opportunity to see where we are today through trips that included classrooms and cornfields, as well as food banks and food processors. And I think often of where we are going, including thoughts on the role agriculture will play in producing food, fiber and fuel for our state and our nation.

Agriculture is Pennsylvania's heritage. And agriculture is Pennsylvania's future. Yet whether contemplating the past or planning for the tomorrow, there is one consistent feeling that remains with me. I am thankful. I am thankful to be involved in an industry that is both my vocation and my avocation. I am thankful for a staff that runs hard each and every day to make their state a better place. I am thankful for the many members of the agriculture family who have voiced their support during this confirmation process. And I am thankful to have this opportunity to help lead a Department that has been a key part of my life and Pennsylvania's future.