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**Testimony to PA Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
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Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Committee about pressing concerns that I share with many citizens. Many of us live in urban communities but we are strongly affected by "rural affairs," in particular the State and Federal Farm policies.

I am keenly aware that a Farm Bill is coming up in the US Congress and that this bill, when passed, will have a huge influence on the future of farming in this country, and by extension on the future of food in our entire country. I am calling on the members of the committee to represent the people of Pennsylvania to the Congress and push for policies in that bill that will serve our people well.

By and large the Farm Bills of the past have subsidized crops and not helped farmers. That is, the emphasis has been on quantity of production of the four basic crops, wheat, corn, soy beans, and cotton to the exclusion of all else. In the meantime, subsidies to the tune of many billions of dollars have gone to the huge agri-business enterprises and the small farmers, receiving merely a few hundred dollars each, are going out of business by the thousands. It's happening here in Pennsylvania just as it is happening across the country.

We are molding our entire food system to accommodate these huge industrial farming operations. We know of places in Pennsylvania where communities have been unable to zone themselves to refuse to have "factory farms" within their boundaries, even though the people do not want this kind of cruel and polluting operation within their boundaries. CAFOs are never good neighbors. We know of major pollution episodes from these operations where waste products foul the ground and surface waters. We are finding the products from these operations degrading the quality of our food.

There are alternatives and we want the Agriculture And Rural Affairs Committee to give at least equal weight to those alternatives as they consider the future of farming in Pennsylvania. We view this as a matter of economic security. We are less secure in so far as we have to transport our food supplies long distances using imported petroleum. We are less secure in so far as we use more and more pesticides and herbicides to produce our foods. We are less secure in our health as the quality of our foods goes down and down, as our people succumb to the industrial food system's advertising to eat less and less healthy foods and stuff our selves with empty calories, fats and sugars. Our nation becomes more and more obese as we promote this kind of cultural suicide. If we had a strong local food economy, we could laugh at anyone who threatened our energy supplies. That would be real National Security.

So, all this says we need your leadership in promoting the attitude in Pennsylvania of "Buy Fresh, Buy Local." We want to prevent sprawl and preserve small local farms near our cities and towns. We want to preserve and promote quality fresh foods. We want to support value added enterprises so our farmers and their families can make a decent living without having to work multiple jobs. We want to see

Pennsylvania's farm products having the highest "nutrient density" in the country. We want to be known as leaders in quality, not in tons of chicken grown in the least amount of time.

One more thing about the value of small farms and the cost of big ones. We are all conscious of the uproar about bees dying off across the country. It appears that bee immune systems are depressed for some reason and the colonies are now susceptible to stresses that formerly were considered minor. We know, for example, that many bees have been fed high fructose corn syrup rather than relying on the natural sources of food. We have no idea what this does to the bees.

What we do know is that pollination is vital and that thousands of other organisms, both insect and otherwise, can participate in the job... if they are present in the vicinity. In small farms, where many crops are grown and where fields lie fallow part of the time and where strips of other herbaceous plants (sometimes known as weeds) may border fields, or even, Heaven forbid, grow among the crops, beneficial insects can survive and help in the pollination process. When we kill off all the weeds with herbicides we also make the land a desert for insects which provide hundreds of environmental services.

We need to have a systems approach to farm policy, at the State and Federal levels. We need to see what farming does to and for our communities, to our people, not just to the agri-businesses that dominate the farming industry. We need to love the land, not just think of it in terms of how much money we can make from it. We need to respect the animals we raise, not think of them simply as units of production.

I appreciated Senator Brubaker's remarks to the PA Association for Sustainable Agriculture in February. I hope to see good things coming out of this Committee, policies and legislation that will benefit the small farmers and the local businesses at least as much as the larger ones. I hope you will share these concerns with our Federal legislators as they have to consider the Farm Bill in Washington.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to speak to you today.