

***Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee Public Hearing***

PA Preferred Testimony

Fred Recchiuti, General Manager, Basciani Foods, Avondale, PA
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I'm Fred Recchiuti, General Manager of Basciani Foods. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee to testify on behalf of the American Mushroom Institute and Basciani Foods, both members of the *PA Preferred* Program. The American Mushroom Institute is a national voluntary trade association representing the growers, processors, suppliers and marketers of cultivated and specialty mushrooms in the United States. Basciani Foods is a family owned company with growing, packing and distribution facilities in Avondale, PA. Thank you for inviting me here today.

Pennsylvania mushroom growers benefit from the *PA Preferred* label in several ways. According to recent statistics, almost 95 percent of Pennsylvania consumers are interested in purchasing and consuming locally sourced products. The *PA Preferred* logo helps consumers identify mushrooms and other products of Pennsylvania agriculture, providing a valuable service to producers and consumers. Retailers, wholesalers and the media also recognize the label as a symbol of quality and excellence. The program works closely with these groups to increase the number of Pennsylvania produced products available to consumers in the state and throughout the United States.

There is a cost to mushroom growers to change the labels on their products. Producers have invested significantly in the logo by altering their packaging to include it. Retailers have built entire advertising campaigns around it. If the *PA Preferred* label were to become a continuing program, it would benefit participants because growers would know that it wasn't going to change from one administration to the next. If retail outlets know that the *PA Preferred* label will be around for more than a year or so, they might be more likely to buy-in to the program and promote the labeled products in their stores. The program currently has a significant economic impact for the commonwealth and Pennsylvania mushroom growers and is gaining momentum.

Consumers need constant reminders that mushrooms from Pennsylvania are nutritious, easy to prepare and available year-round. The *PA Preferred* logo on the package helps us increase awareness and keep our product in front of consumers. Many of our mushroom recipe booklets, nutritional brochures, variety information packets and other promotional materials carry the *PA Preferred* label – a significant investment.

The *PA Preferred* generic marketing and promotion program is a tool to reach consumer, retail and foodservice outlets. Each year more funds are necessary to build demand for a Commonwealth product, to protect the value perception of fresh and processed mushrooms and to create a sustainable competitive position for Pennsylvania mushroom growers. The *PA Preferred* program has enabled small Pennsylvania companies to have their products considered for inclusion in major retail, wholesale and distribution chains.

Mushrooms are the Commonwealth's top cash crop. Pennsylvania produces 65 percent of all the mushrooms grown in the United States. From packing and processing, to trucking and all the service-related industries, the Commonwealth's mushroom farmers support a billion dollar industry that brings jobs and revenue to Pennsylvania. PA mushroom farms are family owned businesses, are multi-generational, use both conventional and organic agricultural practices and vary in size. Pennsylvania produces primarily fresh mushrooms, but some product is grown for processing, for canned, frozen and quick blanched products. Last year's statistics include:

- 71 growers
- 524,587,000 pounds of *Agaricus* (white and brown mushrooms)
- \$461,936,000 value
- 10 million pounds of "specialty" mushrooms with a value of \$30 million

On behalf of Pennsylvania mushroom growers, I ask you to support the *PA Preferred* legislation so that we can continue to market and promote our product, add value to the economy, create jobs, keep tax dollars in Pennsylvania and preserve the Commonwealth's position as the number one producer of mushrooms in the United States.