

Testimony
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Department of Agriculture
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House Tourism & Economic and Recreational Development Committee
Joint Informational Meeting on
Horticulture and the Impact on the Tourism Industry in Pennsylvania
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Good Morning Chairman Pashinski, Chairman Moul, Chairwoman Daley, Chairwoman Oberlander, and members of the Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Tourism & Economic and Recreational Development committees, thank you for the opportunity to join you today and discuss the importance of the Horticulture Industry in our Commonwealth.

I serve as the director of the Bureau of Plant Industry in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. The Bureau of Plant Industry protects the Commonwealth's plant resources and provides consumer protection and safety for Pennsylvania citizens by ensuring quality products and services through certification, licensing, product registration, survey, monitoring, and inspection programs. The Bureau does this through three distinct divisions: Agronomic Services and Regional Programs; Health and Safety; and Plant Protection.

The Division of Plant Protection work includes detection, identification, and control of destructive plant pests. Plant Protection is responsible for the identification and regulatory control of plant pests including insects, nematodes, fungi, bacteria, and viruses that impact Pennsylvania's natural resources and abundant flora. The backbone of the Plant Protection Division is a multifaceted plant, insect, and disease diagnostic laboratory that supports regulatory inspections programs and participates in survey and outreach programs for the detection of invasive plant pests.

The horticulture industry in Pennsylvania is a vital part of the state's economy and plays a crucial role in Pennsylvania's environment and quality of life. Whether it's fruit production, landscaping, nursery, or public gardens, horticulture contributes to the state's beauty and well-

being. According to the 2021 Pennsylvania Agriculture Economic Impact study, Pennsylvania's plant industries generate an estimated \$52.7 billion in annual economic impact, making these industries vital contributors to Pennsylvania's economy.

According to the USDA, Pennsylvania ranks first nationally in the number of floriculture businesses with 741— significantly ahead of New York's 596. With \$209 million annually in sales, Pennsylvania ranks 8th. Floriculture includes retail and wholesale businesses that sell fresh cut flowers, potted annuals and perennials, floral greens and plant propagation materials. Nurseries, garden centers, public gardens and flower farms – and the products they sell that grace our landscape and experiences -- are part of the fabric of Pennsylvania life.

Agriculture, which includes horticulture, is a major driver of Pennsylvania's economy, contributing \$132.5 billion annually overall. It contributes approximately \$1 of every \$16 dollars in gross state product . Pennsylvania's plant industries, which serve both humans and animals, are inextricably linked to what makes Pennsylvania an attractive place to live, work, play, and visit.

It does not come as a surprise, based on those figures, that agriculture was selected as one of the key pillars of the Governor's proposed Statewide Economic Development Strategy. This strategy aims to direct specialized, targeted investment to key sectors of interest. For the first time, agriculture is considered among the likes of robotics, life sciences, and manufacturing. While those of us in the industry have long known agriculture's economic power, we have struggled to obtain access to traditional economic and workforce development efforts. As a key pillar of this plan, agriculture, including our robust horticulture industry, will have access to the tools they need to continue to grow, thrive, and remain dominant among competitors.

Pennsylvania is home to over 30 public gardens, including botanical gardens, arboretums, and urban greening organizations. These institutions maintain collections of plants for public education, enjoyment, research, and conservation. These public gardens contribute to

education, community partnerships, development, research, agricultural cultivation, tourism, and conservation across the state.

Horticulture and tourism intersect beautifully in Pennsylvania, offering visitors a chance to explore lush gardens, arboretums, and agritourism destinations, such as the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society Philadelphia Flower Show, Home & Garden Show at the Farm Show Complex, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh, Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, and Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, which is America's oldest living botanic garden. Bartram's Garden is nestled in the urban bustle of Philadelphia, where one can explore wildflower meadows, majestic trees, river trails, wetlands, and historic botanic gardens of American native plants, while only steps away from heart of the city. These green spaces not only celebrate horticulture but also contribute to tourism, providing visitors with a chance to connect with nature, learn about their environment, and find solace even in the midst of a hectic city.

Revenue from farm agritourism in Pennsylvania more than tripled between 2002 and 2017, according to the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistic Service (USDA NASS). In 2017, Pennsylvania agritourism sales reached \$27 million, up from \$24.7 million in 2012. Agritourism activities, such as corn mazes, cut your own flowers, orchard picking, farm and wine tours, hayrides, cut your own Christmas tree, and pumpkin patches provide farmers with an opportunity to diversify their income and connect directly with consumers in their own backyard. Bucks County received the highest agritourism revenues in 2017, totaling \$5,213,000. Despite having only 36 agritourism operators, the average income per operator was \$144,806. Lancaster County, with 77 operators, had an average per-operator income of \$67,234.

We must continue to invest in our burgeoning agritourism industry, as it is another avenue that farmers and agriculturalists can use to diversify their income and strengthen their business's resiliency. We have made strides in doing so through the Pennsylvania Farm Bill. Still the only

state level farm bill in the nation, the PA Farm Bill has directed over \$120 million in funding to Pennsylvania's agriculture industry since its inception in 2019.

The PA Farm Bill allowed us to make investments like we never could before. From supporting indoor growers through the urban agriculture grant, to exposing youth to horticulture in schools through the Ag and Youth Grant Program, the PA Farm Bill has been a transformative tool to help further invest in our "green industry" broadly. But we recognized the need to do more and were pleased to see the passage of HB 157, which will allow the PA Preferred program to distribute marketing grants, to help further promote PA agriculture and our state brand. These dollars aim to assist farmers better market their products and experiences, which will directly assist our agritourism industry by advertising consumer opportunities and help further promote all of the unique offerings and opportunities of PA agriculture.

The "green industry" in Pennsylvania is comprised of wholesale nursery and greenhouse growers, landscape contractors, and retail garden centers, to name a few. Like "green industry," jobs in the building and energy-production sectors, the plant industry sector holds the potential to solve many of our most pressing environmental challenges, making the sector even more critical to our quality of life. The department's role in regulating hemp, supporting more than \$1.1 million in grants to hemp growers, and millions in research that holds promise for developing plant-based products from textiles to plastics to construction materials is just one example of that potential.

But while Pennsylvania's "green industry" leads the nation in both production and sales, our industry is vulnerable to external threats. From an increasingly volatile climate, to the uptick in invasive species and plant health threats, the Bureau continues to remain vigilant and coordinate our responses alongside industry to ensure we are appropriately meeting needs.

Based on these threats, and unforeseen threats, the department is in the developmental phase of a Center for Plant Excellence, funded by Governor Shapiro in his last budget at \$250,000, and

based on the model provided in the existing three Centers of Excellence. Each of the existing Centers has provided for coordination and advancement in their respective industries and served as a vehicle for economic drivers for Pennsylvania. The new Center for Plant Excellence will recognize the vital contributions and inextricable links of the plant industry sector to the broader agricultural economy.

Technological advances in plant science have provided an unprecedented opportunity for the establishment of a Center for Plant Excellence. Plant health, pest and disease resistance have dramatically accelerated in recent decades through breeding, genetic advancements, combined with methods of subsequent plant propagation. While many technologies have focused on corn, soybeans, and potatoes, the diversity of crop production and agronomic production in Pennsylvania will be uniquely served by a dedicated center. The revitalization of small farms in the context of Community Supported Agriculture is resulting in a diversity of vegetable and root crops, as well as processed and preserved food products. Each of these industries have specific challenges and opportunities that will be addressed through the collaborative, interdisciplinary efforts of the Center of Plant Excellence, that will be focused through education, experience-sharing, and research grant programs.

In summary, horticulture, along with other agricultural sectors, play a vital role and contributes significantly to Pennsylvania's economic vitality, our tourism industry, and it sustains livelihoods across the state.

Thank you for giving the Department of Agriculture the opportunity to discuss the importance of the Horticulture Industry in Pennsylvania. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.