

Testimony
Russell C. Redding, Secretary
Department of Agriculture
Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee
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Good afternoon Chairman Vogel, Chairwoman Schwank, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee as you consider my nomination by Governor Shapiro to serve as the 27th Secretary of Agriculture.

This role, the responsibilities entrusted within it, and the privilege to serve, are humbling. I have dedicated my life to agriculture and public service, working to advance an industry that is at the center of some of the most important issues of our time and shape the quality of life for every Pennsylvanian.

I am honored to represent an industry and community which has defined Pennsylvania since its earliest beginnings. To be a steward of the public trust, and to work to bring the potential and promise of agriculture to fruition, requires sturdy roots, strong leadership, solid partnerships, and an adept team. I am confident that we have all these elements to keep Pennsylvania agriculture growing.

In our initial discussions about serving, I was struck by Governor Shapiro's energy, experience, and vision for Pennsylvania, and for agriculture. His desire to bring people together, ensure that our rural communities are not forgotten, and his statement "that when I look at agriculture, I see the future of Pennsylvania" were inspiring and exciting – so much so that I committed to work with him and a new administration to help keep the Commonwealth as a leader in agriculture.

Governor Shapiro's vision builds on the strong roots we have laid for generations but also brings a new approach and fresh perspective. For the first time, agriculture is in the Economic Development Strategy Group. This message is clear – agriculture is a business and access to

capital, workforce, investments, and efficient and effective permitting are key to our success. This will also allow us to cultivate new opportunities as we continue the momentum that has been steadily building through strategic investments and a dynamic recognition of who, where, and what our agriculture industry is today.

From the only state-level farm bill to our nation-leading farmland preservation program, world-renowned animal and plant health systems, advanced food and consumer safety processes, and robust market and economic efforts, the Department of Agriculture (Department) is positioned well to better serve Pennsylvanians.

We have seen a resurgence of consumers wanting to be better connected to where their food comes from, concerns for sustainability, and eager for opportunities in agriculture in their communities. As Secretary, I intend to work with you and other members of the General Assembly and other stakeholders to take full advantage of these societal changes.

This work begins within the Department by modernizing our facilities, ensuring our staff complement is commensurate to the expectations, and upgrading our IT infrastructure, while also focusing on process improvements. The team at the Department is awe-inspiring. They bring expertise, knowledge, and passion to the work we do, and the progress we make is because of them. But there is more to do. Agriculture is an industry fueled by innovation and technology. What happens in agriculture has shaped and defined society, and the Department must be resourced to meet the needs of a modern and rapidly changing industry and food system.

From this foundation, we can see our other initiatives start to take shape, such as making more capital available to farmers and agribusinesses for on-farm innovation and larger economic investments. We will work to grow these businesses, and subsequently identify and capture market prospects, in channels like local, organic, international, urban, and controlled environment agriculture.

Critical to our success is the partnership with Congress and our federal agencies. There is tremendous potential ahead of us through the 2023 federal Farm Bill, with Pennsylvania in a

leadership position of the House Agriculture Committee, and a strong seat on the Senate Agriculture Committee. We are engaged with stakeholders to identify and define priorities, build support, and find common ground. This work, and the outcome of the Farm Bill, will have immeasurable impacts on Pennsylvanians, just as our own state Farm Bill has, and I am eager to work in a bipartisan and proactive effort to ensure all voices have input into the development of this legislation.

Industry growth must be matched with connecting the workforce with education and in-demand skills. Pennsylvania is home to remarkable universities, colleges, and trade schools, and we need to be using the full potential of these institutions to drive advancement, with input and guidance from the needs of industry. Our workforce needs are complex, and we must work with our education partners at the state and federal levels to better support those needs here in the Commonwealth.

The evolution of innovation, technology, and workforce are magnified by the evolution within the food system itself. We intend to feed the future by feeding equality. Conversations around food insecurity now focus on efforts to establish permanent access to nutritious, appropriate foods in food deserts or underserved communities, regardless of zip code. In rural and urban communities, we are engaging and educating youth as early as preschool on the value of local foods and the benefits of agriculture. We seek ways to balance food production with environmental stewardship, caring deeply for the land, soil, water, and people who provide so much to our lives. We clearly hear the voices of beginning farmers, entrepreneurs, and innovators – all agriculturalists whose experiences and perspective bring a wealth of hope and vitality.

I accepted this nomination because I know there is more to do for agriculture, and there are challenges we must confront. We continue to work with the United States Department of Agriculture and industry partners to respond to High Path Avian Influenza (HPAI). HPAI is a reminder of the continuous threat of animal disease that we must be prepared for through research, practice, and personnel. Our farmland is threatened by the pressures of development, and resources to preserve more farms, advance conservation efforts, and support land access are

critical to the vitality of our agriculture community. We must continue to build our food processing capacity and ways for farmers to add value to their products and connect to markets with reliable broadband service. The impacts of climate on production are evident and have ripple effects across food systems. Geopolitical events are reshaping trade, economies, and relationships. Food insecurity and access remain all too common across all demographics and regions, and we must identify ways to equitably share our bountiful harvests. Farmers face fluctuating farm finances, inflation, and increased input and production costs, all of which take a toll on their mental health, families, and communities. We are fortunate the farm community is resilient and takes a long view of their work.

Even so, I recognize that Pennsylvania agriculture has been on a path of change for over 200 years, and I am hopeful for our future and our chances at success to grow this industry. I am hopeful that we will continue to be united in progress and approach this work with intention, civility, and dignity. I want agriculture's voice at every table and to let everyone who wants one, a seat at the table of agriculture.

I have traveled this Commonwealth, in every season, across every county, on back roads and city streets, and have heard stories and met the most innovative, compelling, and inspiring farmers, stakeholders, elected officials, and Pennsylvanians who are also hopeful about the future of agriculture.

I'll end with the first paragraph of the FFA Creed, as it has been a guiding force throughout my life and captures well my hope for the future: *"I believe in the future of agriculture, with a faith born not of words but of deeds – achievements won by the present and past generations of agriculturists; in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us from the struggles of former years."*

Members of the Committee, I believe Pennsylvania is ripe for opportunity in agriculture, and by working together, we will have many bountiful harvests for generations to come.

Thank you for your support of Pennsylvania agriculture.