

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE February 13, 2018

PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANGE GRADES PROPOSED PA BUDGET

LEMOYNE, PA...The PA State Grange gave an overall grade of B- to the State Budget proposed February 6 by Governor Tom Wolf. Here are the grades by program.

GRADE A

- An increase in the General Government Operations line item of \$2.6 million for the PA Department of Agriculture. This line item covers staff, benefits, and pensions – all essential components of the Department being able to do its' job.
- Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences for Extension and Ag Research at \$52.313 million
- Continued support for the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine (\$30.135 million)
- Transfer from Environmental Stewardship Fund to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program increased from \$9.893 million to \$11,037 million.
- Continued emphasis on repairing rural roads and locally-owned bridges to reach a goal of 1,100 miles of rural and low-volume road improvements over a five-year period. The \$200 million over the period includes more than 620 miles in FY 2018-19.
- \$1.597 million to combat the Spotted Lanternfly threat coupled with perhaps \$10-12 million in Federal funds.

GRADE B

- The proposed Budget continues \$1.0 million support for PASS (fresh farm products to food banks). We support an effort to increase the level to \$3.0 million to better meet the existing need.
- Nutrient Management Program, Youth Shows, and Farmers Market Food Coupons are all designated to receive the same level of funding as last year.
- \$28 million for Dirt and Gravel Roads (same as current) and a slight increase in grants to Conservation Districts from \$2.851 million to \$2.877 million are helpful but may not meet the need to get PA in compliance with EPA's mandates for the Chesapeake Bay.
- PA Preferred branding program continues to receive funding of \$605,000.

This is such an important marketing tool to promote PA Agriculture that we urge a funding increase in this line item.

GRADE C

- Broadband (Internet and cell phone) access is a critical need for many rural Pennsylvanians, farmers, and rural businesses. Increasing this access is also essential for rural students. In the new State Budget proposal, there is an increase in funding for computer science education but that is not going to help rural students who cannot do Internet homework at home. We strongly support the implementation of telemedicine to further make health care accessible to seniors. Without sufficient Internet speed, this goal is not attainable. In addition, Rural Development is crippled and modern farm equipment cannot be fully utilized without Broadband equity There is NO funding in the proposed FY 2018-19 State Budget specifically earmarked for Broadband expansion nor is there an offer of matching funds to convince the Federal Communications Commission to reverse its decision not to give PA over \$100 million to increase Broadband access.

The PA State Grange is however encouraged to see that Governor Wolf has designated a "Broadband Czar" to try to leverage whatever resources are available and attempt to build public--private partnerships.

GRADE D

Imposing a \$25 per resident fee for 67% of PA communities to fund State Police law enforcement is a real burden to rural PA. These governments would have to reduce services or locally-owned road and bridge maintenance, something that will work at odds with the infrastructure pledge made above. PA State Grange recognizes the issue and the need for the State Police to be properly funded because of the additional work load but feels more research is needed to find a more equitable way to fund this essential governmental function.

GRADE F

Once again, a State Budget proposes to eliminate funding for important agricultural programs. This criticism is not targeting Governor Wolf per se, since Governors from both parties have used this as a budget strategy. They zero out those programs that the Agricultural Community really wants and use these line items as bargaining chips for the State Budget negotiations. Here are programs marked to receive no money in this proposed State Budget:

- Center for Dairy Excellence: With current market conditions, PA dairy farmers are struggling. We applaud the Center's work in helping farmers and promoting the value of this nutritional product.

- Center for Beef Excellence – an important nutritional food source in a balanced diet
- Agricultural Research (not to be confused with Penn State)
- Agriculture Promotion, Education & Exports: Exports keep farmers in business.
- Livestock Show and Open Dairy Show
- Hardwoods Research & Promotion: Pennsylvania’s renewable resource
- Food Marketing & Research: Commodity marketing is crucial.

Source for these grades comes from the Office of the Budget's Budget Book for FY 2018-19. Department of Agriculture pages begin on Page E7-1 (Page 335 out of 930). <http://www.budget.pa.gov/PublicationsAndReports/CommonwealthBudget/Documents/2018-19%20Proposed%20Budget/2018-19%20Governor%27s%20Executive%20Budget%20-%20Web.pdf>