

# AG ONE Newsletter Budget Issue

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*AG ONE is a periodic newsletter on legislation, regulations and agricultural topics produced by Phillips Associates expressly for the Pennsylvania State Council of Farm Organizations (PSCFO), an organization of over 60 organizations sharing an interest in promoting Pennsylvania's Number One industry, Agriculture. Questions or comments should go to PSCFO leadership or to 717/232-9665 or email to [xenobun@aol.com](mailto:xenobun@aol.com). AG ONE Newsletter, PA State Council of Farm Organizations, 26 North Ninth Street, Lemoyne, PA 17043. Material may be cited as long as PSCFO is given appropriate credit.*

## Dear Reader:

Reminder: The PA Department of Agriculture budget hearings are scheduled for March 5 at 10:00 a.m. (House Appropriations Committee) and March 6 at 1:00 p.m. (Senate Appropriations Committee). Check [www.pcntv.com](http://www.pcntv.com) for viewing schedule. Sincerely, *Vince Phillips*

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## GOVERNOR WOLF PRESENTS THE PA FARM BILL

On February 14, the Wolf Administration presented a series of funding enhancements to various agriculture programs. Dubbed 'Pennsylvania's Farm Bill', these changes are expected to invest more than \$24 million in PA Agriculture. Components include:

- **Ag Business Development and Succession Planning:** \$2 million to assist farmers in developing a business plan and succession strategy; Realty Transfer Tax exemption for transfer of preserved farmland to a qualified beginning farmer.
- **Animal Sector:** \$5 million Dairy Investment Program for research, organic transition assistance, value-added processing, etc.; Center for Animal Excellence at \$1 million to support the animal agriculture industry including potential establishment of hemp as an approved animal feed; \$500,000 to help smaller meat processors by subsidizing Federal meat inspection costs and relevant equipment.
- **Business Climate:** \$2.5 million for the Conservation Excellence Grant Program; \$500,000 to re-establish a low interest loan program to help farmers implement Best Management Practices; Expanding Resource Enhancement & Protection Tax Credits by \$3 million; legislation to change transportation requirements; allowing for subdivision of preserved farms (Ag Security Act); and streamline co-op audit reporting requirements.
- **Workforce Development:** \$500,000 in grants to agricultural and rural youth organizations; \$500,000 for PA Farm to School Grant Program.
- **Ag Disaster Response Infrastructure:** \$5 million for response to agricultural disasters such as Avian Influenza or Spotted Lanternfly or response to food-borne illnesses.
- **Market Expansion:** \$1.6 million for promotion of organic farming through PA Preferred Program; \$1 million additional for PA Preferred; \$500,000 for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program; \$500,000 to develop and improve the agriculture infrastructure in urban areas.

## ADMINISTRATION PRESENTS INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN (Including Broadband)

A second Wolf Administration proposal is the Restore Pennsylvania program which seeks to raise \$4.5 billion through a bond issue to be repaid by taxing extraction of natural gas. This money would help subsidize Broadband expansion to rural areas, assist municipalities with flood and storm water control projects and address such areas as town blight and brownfields clean-up.

The fine print contains a proviso that new Marcellus Gas landowner lease agreements would forbid energy companies from subtracting post-production costs from royalty payments or requiring the landowner to pay the severance tax. Senate sponsors of legislation will be Senators John Yudichak (D-Luzerne) and Tom Killion (R-Delaware).

**Link to the Governor's announcement:** <https://www.governor.pa.gov/governor-wolf-outlines-plan-restore-critical-pennsylvania-infrastructure/>

### **WOTUS COMMENT DEADLINE EXTENDED**

April 15, 2019 is the new deadline for persons wishing to comment on the Trump Administration's proposed re-writing of the definition of Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS). The proposed changes define the scope of waters federally regulated under the Clean Water Act in the [Federal Register](#). When commenting, use Docket Number EPA-HQ-OW-2018-0149.

The extension on the comment period came in part from a February 12 letter signed by 160 Democratic Members of Congress including four from PA: Matt Cartwright, Brendan Boyle, Mike Doyle, and Mary Gay Scanlon.

Comments may be submitted electronically through <http://www.regulations.gov>, by email to [OW-Docket@epa.gov](mailto:OW-Docket@epa.gov) or through the U.S. Postal Service to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA Docket Center, Office of Water Docket, Mail Code 28221T, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20460

### **REGULATORY UPDATES**

- On February 23, the PA Department of Agriculture published a notice to peach and nectarine producers that it is almost time to vote on the referendum which takes place every five years on whether or not the marketing campaign should continue. The referendum period extends from March 18 – April 1, 2019. Those voting must have at least 500 trees. Results will be released within 30 days after April 9.
- PA Milk Marketing Board is convening hearings on March 6 and April 3, 2019 at PDA. Among other things, PMMB will receive comments on setting the over-order premium at \$1.00 per hundredweight. Questions: [deberly@pa.gov](mailto:deberly@pa.gov)

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SEEN AS HOUSE PRIORITY**

On February 19, House Education Committee Chairs Rep. Curt Sonney (R-Erie) and Rep. Jim Roebuck (D-Phila.) convened a press conference to present a bipartisan package of legislation designed to enhance workforce development in the Commonwealth. These eight bills will be voted on by the Education Committee on March 11. Please refer to [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us) to look up sponsorship memos and bill text for House Bill 265, House Bill 297, House Bill 334, House Bill 393, House Bill 394, House Bill 395, House Bill 396 and House Bill 522. The following links you to the press release describing in brief each of the bills: <http://www.repsonney.com/NewsItem.aspx?NewsID=274906>

### **UPCOMING HARRISBURG HEARINGS**

- February 27: PA Game Commission before the House Game & Fisheries Committee. NOTE: Sunday hunting topic will likely be raised.
- March 19: Joint Legislative Conservation Committee will hold a hearing on Bike Tourism initiatives along PA Route 6.
- The House and Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing on the PA Farm Bill proposal on March 20.