

Dear Members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee,

On behalf of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and ensure that the agricultural community's voices are heard. We appreciate the committee's willingness to examine the issues affecting our Pennsylvania farmers.

For those who may be unfamiliar with our organization, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is the Commonwealth's largest general agriculture organization, representing 26,000 members and farms of every size and commodity across the Commonwealth. As a grassroots organization, our policy positions are developed and adopted by our members through our county Farm Bureaus, ensuring that the positions we advocate reflect the priorities and concerns of farmers across Pennsylvania.

Labor

Among the many challenges facing agriculture, maintaining a steady and reliable workforce remains a significant concern. Agriculture contributes approximately \$132.5 billion to Pennsylvania's economy, making a strong agricultural workforce essential to the Commonwealth's economic success (*Career Exploration*, 2026). 25% of Pennsylvania farms higher farm labor (*United States Department of Agriculture* 2022). At the same time, the agricultural workforce is aging, creating additional challenges as farms work to attract and retain the next generation of workers. Ensuring farmers have access to a dependable workforce is critical to maintaining productivity, supporting family farms, and strengthening Pennsylvania's agricultural industry.

While seasonal agricultural labor programs provide valuable support, they do not fully address the workforce needs of agricultural operations that operate year-round. Industries such as dairy, mushroom production, and nursery operations require employees throughout the year, creating a need for workforce solutions that provide farmers with reliable access to labor beyond seasonal periods.

Agricultural Education

While addressing the current agricultural workforce shortage is important, Pennsylvania must also look toward the future. Agricultural education plays a critical role in helping students understand where their food comes from, the importance of agriculture to Pennsylvania's economy, and the wide range of careers available within the industry.

Agriculture is much more than farming. The industry relies on veterinarians, mechanics, engineers, food scientists, educators, financial professionals, and many other occupations. As agriculture continues to evolve, the industry needs workers with both traditional agricultural knowledge and skills in science, technology, business, and communications.

Early exposure to agriculture can help students recognize the many meaningful career opportunities available to them. Programs such as agricultural education, FFA, 4-H, and career and technical education provide students with hands-on experiences, career exploration, and opportunities to develop leadership, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.

It is essential that we continue to support these programs for the next generation. Agricultural education also benefits students who may never work directly in agriculture by helping them understand the work, resources, and challenges involved in producing the food we all depend on.

Investing in agricultural education is an investment in Pennsylvania's future workforce. By exposing students to agriculture and providing pathways into agricultural careers, we can help ensure Pennsylvania has the skilled workforce needed to support farms, agribusinesses, and our broader food system for generations to come.

Operation Cost

Operating costs continue to rise, placing additional financial pressure on Pennsylvania's farmers. Fuel is a significant part of those expenses, particularly diesel, which is essential to nearly every aspect of agricultural production. The national average price of diesel is currently \$6.38 per gallon, while the average Pennsylvania farm is approximately 144 acres. Depending on the type of operation and equipment required, the cost of fuel can quickly add up, with a single piece of machinery potentially requiring roughly \$1,000 in fuel expenses during a harvest season (*Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update*, 2026; *United States Department of Agriculture*, 2022).

Diesel is essential to agricultural operations, from planting and harvesting to transporting commodities and supplies. With farmers already facing significant increases in input and operating costs, reducing the burden of fuel expenses can provide meaningful short-term relief. For this reason, we call upon the General Assembly to consider temporarily suspending the state gasoline and diesel fuel tax for a minimum of 60 days, but no more than 90 days.

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Farmland Preservation

One of the greatest concerns we hear from our members is the loss of productive farmland in Pennsylvania. Farmland is a finite resource that supports food production, family farms, rural economies, and Pennsylvania's broader agricultural industry.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau recognizes the need for economic development and infrastructure, but encourages development to be directed toward previously developed sites, brownfields, and areas with existing infrastructure whenever possible. Protecting productive farmland ensures Pennsylvania can continue to support agriculture and future generations of farmers.

Mental Health

Agriculture is a demanding industry to be a part of, and the mental and physical toll it can take on farmers and agricultural workers can be significant. In the United States, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death (Eisenreich & Pollari, 2025). Rural populations experience significantly higher rates of suicide than urban populations, with farmers facing additional stressors related to the unique challenges of agricultural work. Farmer suicide rates are approximately 3.5% higher than those of the general population (Eisenreich & Pollari, 2025). When you live and work on a farm, the work never truly stops. The long hours, demanding responsibilities, and often isolated nature of agricultural work can leave farmers feeling overwhelmed and alone.

It is important to check in on our neighbors, friends, and fellow agricultural community members and to recognize when someone may be struggling. Increasing awareness of mental health in rural communities can help reduce stigma, encourage people to seek support, and remind farmers that they do not have to face these challenges alone.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania agriculture faces significant challenges, but with continued support for our farmers, workforce, education, and farmland, we can help ensure the industry remains strong for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau welcomes any opportunity to support Pennsylvania agriculture and the farmers who feed our communities.

Citations

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