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Secretary of Agriculture Celebrates Agricultural Heritage, Wolf Administration Commitment to Strong, Sustainable Future

State College, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding joined agriculture educators and students today to celebrate Pennsylvania's rich, agricultural heritage and promising future at the 150-year old Hess Farm in State College. With more than 13 million Pennsylvanians and countless others around the world relying on Pennsylvania agriculture for food, fuel and fiber and more than 590,000 jobs tied to the industry, Governor Tom Wolf is set to invest more than \$106 million this year in programs that secure a strong future for the industry.

"Pennsylvania's history is rooted in agriculture. From the earliest chapters written by Pennsylvania's first settlers who came together and worked each other's fields – building lives for themselves and feeding their communities – to the pages we write today," said Redding. "Our actions today will write the next chapters. From the Farm Vitality Grant Program to investments in science and research, the Wolf Administration has committed more than \$106 million this year to ensuring food will continue to fuel Pennsylvania for generations to come."

The Hess Farm, which holds farmstead status with the National Historic Register, is the third stop on Redding's [Food Fuels PA tour](#). Jeff and Cindy Harding, who own the farm now, look to continue that tradition by transitioning the farm to their children with support from a \$7,500 Pennsylvania Farm Bill Farm Vitality Grant.

Acknowledging the essentiality of agriculture, recently the Wolf Administration has taken steps to ensure the vitality of the industry through new support and funding. Since taking office, Wolf increased investments in agricultural and animal research from \$787,000 annually to \$2.187 million annually for a total investment of \$13.7 million to support a sustainable industry.

The Pennsylvania Farm Bill, signed into law in 2019 and a result of an in-depth economic impact report and industry analysis, is full of programs designed to support the strength of the industry and a bright future. It includes programs such as:

- The \$1 million [Farm Vitality Grant Program](#): a program aimed at enhancing the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania's farms through sound business planning, efficient transitions of farm ownership, strategic farm expansion and diversification.
- The \$500,000 [Farm to School Grant Program](#): a program created to improve childhood access to health, local foods and increase agriculture education opportunities for pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.
- The \$500,000 [Ag and Youth Grant Program](#): a program designed explicitly to address the looming workforce deficit the industry faces by funding ag education projects, programs, and equipment.

- A [Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Program](#), with up to \$6 million in credits available annually, for owners of agricultural assets who sell or rent their assets to beginning farmers.
- The [Agricultural Business Development Center](#), funded at \$1 million, to support farm transitions, beginning farmers, risk management, and provide other opportunities for financial assistance.

Whether children grow up on a farm like the five Harding family kids — who all now work in various sectors of agriculture — or not, all children should be given equal opportunities to experience the value and diversity of Pennsylvania agriculture and take advantage of the multitude of meaningful career paths available.

"Growing up, I was lucky enough to gain hands-on agriculture education from living on a farm as well as my time in 4-H," said 4-H state council member Isabel Poorbaugh. "Through the experiences and knowledge I gained then, I grew an immense appreciation for the agricultural products I use every day as well as the hard-working hands that have produced them."

With the future of Pennsylvania agriculture relying on today's children being given opportunities to experience it, in 2018 Wolf established the Commission for Agricultural Education Excellence to develop a statewide plan to improve agriculture education opportunities and programming in the commonwealth. The commission works with an annual budget of \$250,000 to achieve goals and objectives laid out in their annual workplan.

"The recent breakdowns in our food supply chain are a stark reminder we must never take agriculture for granted. Pennsylvania agriculture is facing incredible challenges, and, as in the past, we will continue to work together building resilience through research and education," said Dr. Hoover, Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education.

The budget also invests \$54.96 million in the Penn State Agricultural Research and Extension for operations that help the agriculture industry, communities and individuals solve problems in all 67 Pennsylvania counties.

Finally, to ensure the availability and accessibility of food to fuel us all, the Department of Agriculture dedicates an average of \$40 million annually to the preservation of productive farmland. Pennsylvania's Farmland Preservation program leads the nation, and since taking office in 2015, Wolf increased funding for the program by more than 132 percent. The administration's \$253 million investment has preserved more than 100,000 acres since 2015.

For more information on the Wolf Administration's work to strengthen the future of Pennsylvania agriculture, visit agriculture.pa.gov.

Note: Photo and video of the event available at PACast.com.

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