



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 10, 2021

View Online

Wolf Administration Highlights \$3 Million Support for Pennsylvania's Farmer-Veterans, Services Available for Entering Agriculture Post-Service

Thanks Pennsylvania's 7,000 veterans working in Pennsylvania agriculture for service to country and commonwealth.

Spring Mills, PA - Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs Brigadier General (PA) Maureen Weigl visited Sinking Creek Meats today, a veteran-owned beef operation and PA Preferred® [Homegrown By Heroes](#) member in Centre County. The visit was Redding's fourth stop on his statewide [Food Fuels PA tour](#).

Since 2015, Governor Tom Wolf has invested more than \$3 million to support the commonwealth's farmer-veterans who protect and cultivate the land, feed communities and fuel prosperity.

"As we honor Veteran's Day, we say thank you to the military service people who have selflessly served our country," said Secretary Redding. "Veterans in agriculture have the unique distinction of both protecting and feeding the people and places we call home. Supporting veteran farmers through the Homegrown By Heroes program is one small way we can give back to a community who has given us so much."

Chris Ishler, fifth-generation farmer and co-owner of Sinking Creek Meats is a U.S. Army Reserve veteran who served as an Army mechanic from 2001-2009. In 2019, Ishler and partner Eliza Walton established Sinking Creek Meats to provide their community with locally raised Angus beef through direct to consumer sales.

In the United States, less than two percent of the population are farmers and less than seven percent have served in the armed forces. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture, Pennsylvania is home to more than 7,000 military veterans identified as agricultural producers.

"There is a strong connection between the military and agriculture when you consider that servicemembers and farmers are committed to serving their communities and our country," said Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, deputy adjutant general for Veterans Affairs. "We are grateful to Secretary Redding and the Wolf Administration for investing in the Homegrown By Heroes Program, and for recognizing the contributions veterans make to Pennsylvania's agricultural industry."

The [PA Preferred Homegrown By Heroes](#) program is an initiative for veterans coordinated by the [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#) to build brand recognition. By looking for the Homegrown By Heroes logo, consumers can easily identify and support veteran-owned businesses. Since Gov. Wolf signed the [Pennsylvania Farm Bill](#) in 2019, \$3 million has been invested in the PA Preferred Homegrown By Heroes program to increase membership, improve consumer brand awareness, and offer services to farmer-veteran members to enhance marketing and business growth.

"Homegrown By Heroes is a fantastic support network for veteran farmers in agriculture," said Ishler. "On top of the product differentiation provided by PA Preferred and Homegrown By Heroes labels, the program supports farmers by connecting them to valuable resources, grants, opportunities and other veterans in agriculture. There are so many programs available to help young or beginning farmers, it can be hard to figure out where to start. We highly recommend reaching out to the Department of Agriculture as a first step!"

"We have a solemn obligation to support veteran-owned businesses and give them the tools they need to thrive," Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman said. "Sinking Creek Meats is a true success story with nearly 60 years in business in central Pennsylvania. I am grateful Secretary Redding chose this venue to highlight how the Homegrown by Heroes program supports the men and women who have served our great nation in the military."

In addition to the \$3 million in farmer-veteran support, the PA Farm Bill also established the [Agricultural Business Development Center](#) (ABDC) which has committed \$2 million to provide financial and technical expertise and support for business planning, farm transitions, expansion, and diversification of agricultural production through the [Farm Vitality Planning Grant](#) program.

Earlier this year, ABDC hosted a series of [free webinars](#) in partnership with the Penn State Small Business Development Center for PA Preferred Homegrown By Heroes members and farmer veterans, introducing participants to opportunities and services in agriculture.

In 2020, the PA Department of Agriculture established a military veterans coordinator position in recognition of the many opportunities in agriculture for veterans with valuable transferable skills. [Joshua Scheinberg, Ph.D.](#) serves in this role. A U.S. Air Force veteran, Scheinberg spent nearly 10 years working in food safety and technical support for small meat processing and the food industry. In his role, Scheinberg is strengthening outreach, support and engagement with veterans in the agriculture community.

"I'm honored and grateful to be in a position to help lead the Department's [Veterans in Agriculture initiative](#)," Scheinberg said. "Whether it be a new career, a form of therapy or recreation, agriculture continues to play an important role in the lives of thousands of veterans in Pennsylvania. I'm excited to continue our work of growing and expanding the department's outreach, programs and technical support to veterans in agriculture."

If you are a veteran or organization engaged in farming or agricultural initiatives, contact Joshua Scheinberg, Military Veterans Coordinator, at jscheinber@pa.gov or 717-919-0377.

MEDIA CONTACT: Shannon Powers - shpowers@pa.gov

###