FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wolf Administration Investments Promote Pollinator Research, Strengthen Resiliency of PA Specialty Crops

University Park, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding was joined by Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Dean Richard Roush to highlight nearly $1 million of Wolf Administration investments strengthening the competitiveness of Pennsylvania specialty crops. There, they joined researchers whose projects are benefitting pollinator health and promoting the competitiveness of Pennsylvania honey.

“Pollinators are critical to the success of Pennsylvania agriculture; one out of every three bites we eat is thanks to pollinators,” said Redding. “Honey bees are a critical part of that narrative, but they are also key to growing new markets for specialty crops. Supporting honey research and promotion through the Pennsylvania Specialty Crop Block Grant allows the commonwealth to grow its honey market while simultaneously supporting research that will benefit pollinator health, and in return, all of Pennsylvania agriculture.”

State Specialty Crop Block Grants fund specialty crops not eligible under the federal specialty crop grant program, and those designated as high priority crops in the state: hemp, hops, hardwoods, honey; and barley, rye and wheat for distilling, brewing, and malting. Eligible projects enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of specialty crops through research to increase conservation and environmental outcomes, enhance food safety, develop new and improved seed varieties, or improve pest and disease control.

The Grozinger Lab, part of Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences’ Center for Pollinator Research, received PA Specialty Crop Block Grant dollars to grow the competitiveness of Pennsylvania honey in the marketplace by identifying honeys’ unique floral origins. The lab uses DNA-barcoding technology to trace pollen grains as botanical fingerprints, allowing Pennsylvania beekeepers to authenticate varietal honey, such as alfalfa, buckwheat, and clover honey. Utilizing the Geographic Information System (GIS) tools through Beescape, the lab will also analyze trends in habitat and threats impacting foraging bees.

The Grozinger Lab is one of 23 projects across 11 counties to benefit from the State Specialty Crop Block Grant, which has awarded nearly $1 million over the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 fiscal years.

Rick Roush, dean of Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences, said the grants are supporting a multidisciplinary team to leverage diverse technologies, including genomics, software engineering and machine learning, to help beekeepers, growers, land managers, and the public map and predict the floral resources different bee species are using.

“This knowledge is important to design pollinator habitats that support bee health, productivity and pollination services,” he said. “We are grateful for the funding and are fortunate to have world-renowned scientists at the Center for Pollinator Research at Penn State. Their research is

critical in preserving the pollination responsible for producing many nutritious foods and seed production to maintain the diversity of plant species."

The State Specialty Crop Block Grants are an element of the Pennsylvania Farm Bill, Governor Wolf's bold, aggressive, and necessary investments in Pennsylvania agriculture to grow opportunities and resources, remove barriers to entry, and inspire future generations of agriculture leaders.

For more information about specialty crop grant programs, contact Morgan Sheffield at 717-787-3568 or msheffield@pa.gov, or visit agriculture.pa.gov.

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

MEDIA CONTACT: Shannon Powers – shpowers@pa.gov

###