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Wolf Administration Highlights Improved Access to Hands-on Ag Education

Robesonia, PA – Today, Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, Acting Secretary of Education Eric Hagarty and Commission for Agriculture Education Excellence Executive Director Stephon Fitzpatrick joined student leaders and educators to celebrate the Wolf Administration's progress in modernizing agriculture education to create relevant, hands-on learning experiences that prepare students for careers that will be in-demand and waiting for them when they graduate.

Local FFA students and ag science educators led officials in a tour of Conrad Weiser High School in Robesonia, Berks County and its cutting-edge facilities and student projects.

"The agriculture industry cannot continue to feed the world without feeding the minds our youth," Secretary Redding said. "The innovative programs we're seeing today are representative of an education that exposes students to the possibilities in agriculture, sparking their imaginations for how their curiosity, passions, and interests can be put to work in our industry. Across Pennsylvania, our programs are preparing an increasingly more diverse group of students who will be agile in adopting technology and solving the complex challenges that come with climate change."

"From hydroponics to animal care, urban gardens to FFA, agriculture education opens up endless opportunities for students to engage in learning that will lead to meaningful, family-sustaining careers," said Acting Secretary of Education Eric Hagarty. "The departments of Education and Agriculture, along with the Pennsylvania Commission for Agriculture Education, are committed to ensuring that learners across the commonwealth can take advantage of high-quality, engaging ag ed curriculum and programming in their school, no matter which city or town they call home."

In 2017, the Wolf Administration, in coordination with the General Assembly created the 15-member Commission for Agricultural Education Excellence to help create and implement a statewide plan to align educational programming with increasingly technological needs of

today's employers. The commission's [third biennial report](#) was released during today's event, outlining progress made on the commission's recommendations.

Highlighted commission accomplishments include:

- Growth in the number of approved secondary ag education programs statewide from 131 to 178 since the commission's inception, with five more pending approval.
- Hiring a dedicated, specialized commission staff with expertise in agriculture-focused career and technical education and diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Assessing the state's ag education Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) and implementing a strategic plan to address gaps, which has led to new Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) chapters in four urban high schools and Delaware Valley University.
- Strengthened or renewed partnerships with Rodale Institute, the Food Policy Advisory Council, and other non-governmental entities specializing in urban and organic agriculture, as well as partnerships across the spectrum from traditional production agriculture, hardwoods and forest products, and "green," or nursery product sectors to enrich their education initiatives.
- Built ties with the Franklin Institute to help build student connections to ag careers in their initiatives.
- Supporting the PA Career Ready Coalition and Remake Learning Day to increase agriculture career literacy for 7,000 students across the state.

Pennsylvania agriculture is a [\\$132.5 billion industry](#) that provides more than 593,000 jobs – a 2.4 percent increase in the size of the workforce since 2018. As the industry innovates, and current workers retire, new opportunities are continually available, with jobs ranging from farm managers to high-tech equipment mechanics, and from field biologists to entomologists to veterinarians. All must be equipped to adapt to changing technology and climate challenges.

Gov. Wolf's commitment to the future of agriculture and a strong workforce to support this essential industry was made clear when he proposed and signed into law the historic [Pennsylvania Farm Bill](#). A first of its kind in the country, the comprehensive package of legislation included a variety of programs – including Ag & Youth, Farm to School, Beginner Farmer Tax Credits, and Farm Vitality – designed to address the industry's looming workforce shortage and secure a stronger future for the industry.

New data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistic Service note that with 12,598 producers under age 35, Pennsylvania has the highest percentage of young producers in the nation.

Learn more about opportunities in agriculture at agriculture.pa.gov/kidsarethefuture.

Find more information about the work of the Pennsylvania Commission for Agriculture Education Excellence at agriculture.pa.gov.

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