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Shapiro Administration Awards \$350,000 Grant to Berks County's Rodale Institute to Support First-in-PA Apprenticeship in Organic Agriculture

Since Governor Shapiro took office, his Administration has supported the creation of nearly 40 new registered apprenticeship programs in Pennsylvania and invested in the Commonwealth's ag industry – including two new apprenticeship programs serving the agriculture industry.

Kutztown, PA – The Shapiro Administration announced today a \$350,000 grant for the development of a first-in-Pennsylvania apprenticeship program that will offer real opportunity to Pennsylvanians seeking in-demand careers as organic compliance inspectors in the agriculture industry. The **Rodale Institute**, a prestigious agricultural research and education nonprofit based in Berks County and dedicated to advancing regenerative organic agriculture, plans to create an earn-as-you-learn registered apprenticeship program and develop a diverse pipeline of highly skilled professionals to serve the certified organic industry throughout the Commonwealth.

Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Secretary Nancy A. Walker and **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding** visited the Rodale Institute today to announce the grant and the Shapiro Administration's support for workforce development projects that create family-sustaining jobs and support Pennsylvania businesses.

"Apprenticeship programs offer pathways to stable careers and family-sustaining wages without the crippling burden of debt. It's also one of the best ways for employers to create customized education programs to ensure they have the talent pipeline they need to grow and be successful in a global economy," **Secretary Walker** said. "The Shapiro Administration is excited to partner with organizations like the Rodale Institute to expand these life-changing opportunities into new

sectors, especially the organic agriculture industry that supports the healthy-food needs of so many Pennsylvania families.”

Since the start of his Administration, **Governor Josh Shapiro** has been focused on creating real opportunities for people to obtain good-paying jobs. That’s why the Governor’s [2024-25 budget proposal](#) builds on the [2023-24 budget](#) with bipartisan support for investments in workforce development, including \$6 million for registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

Under Governor Shapiro’s leadership, L&I and the Department of Agriculture have partnered to create more apprenticeship opportunities and training programs within Pennsylvania’s agriculture industry. This work builds on Governor Shapiro’s investment in organic agriculture through the Center for Organic Excellence, a first-of-its-kind project created in the 2023-24 budget that empowers and supports organic farmers and businesses. As part of this initiative, workforce challenges were identified as a top priority for the industry to ensure continued growth and success.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture ranks Pennsylvania third in the nation for organic commodity sales – which exceeded **\$60 billion in 2022**, according to a study by the Organic Trade Association.

“Getting organic products to the consumers who want them and will pay top dollar requires significant investment,” **Secretary Redding** said. “That’s not just investing in the practices that earn products the USDA Certified Organic label, but in workers who have the skills and know-how to achieve that high standard. Earn-while-you-learn apprenticeships are just one of the critical investments the Shapiro Administration is making to help feed Pennsylvania employer demand for skilled workers, while feeding consumer demand for high-value products that will grow their profits and sustain their future success.”

The Rodale Institute’s registered apprenticeship program will be supported by L&I’s Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO), which is responsible for guiding and promoting the expansion and compliance of all registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs across the Commonwealth. Since the start of the Shapiro Administration, the ATO has supported the creation of 39 new apprenticeship programs in Pennsylvania – including two new apprenticeship programs serving the agriculture industry.

The Rodale Institute’s groundbreaking science and direct farmer support programs serve as a catalyst for change in farming and food production worldwide. Over its 75-year history, Rodale Institute has proven that organic farming is not only viable but essential to humanity’s survival.

“Consumer demand for organic products is growing exponentially and we have the opportunity to onshore production and ensure organic integrity throughout the production process, from farm to market,” said **Rodale Institute CEO, Jeff Tkach**. “Thanks to this support from the Shapiro Administration, Rodale Institute will provide apprentices with a deep understanding of organic farming principles and regulatory compliance, continuing to scale the economic vitality of regenerative organic agriculture in the Commonwealth and nationwide. The Organic Compliance Specialist Registered Apprenticeship offers a unique opportunity for individuals passionate about organic agriculture to receive comprehensive training and hands-on experience, setting them on a path towards a rewarding career in this growing and evolving industry.”

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that, on average, apprentices earn a starting wage of \$80,000 per year after graduation and are on track to earn \$300,000 more over their careers compared to workers who do not graduate from an apprenticeship program. For every dollar spent on apprenticeships, employers get an average of \$1.47 back in increased productivity.

Apprenticeship programs have traditionally served the building trades, and efforts to continue growing opportunities in the trades remains a top priority. The Shapiro Administration has also prioritized the development of apprenticeship programs in new sectors – including agriculture – and is working hard to promote these opportunities to historically underserved populations because apprenticeship is a career pathway to family-sustaining wages without the crippling burden of debt.

The ATO currently supports 881 unduplicated registered apprenticeship program sponsors and 1,554 occupation-specific programs across the Commonwealth, with 15,645 registered apprentices currently active. Additionally, there are 118 registered pre-apprenticeship programs and 1,364 pre-apprentices currently active.

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