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Strengthening Our Workforce: Shapiro Administration Visits Rice Fruit Company to Highlight the Governor's Proposed Investment in Pennsylvania's Agricultural Workforce

The demand for WEDnetPA, which helps employers train new and existing employees, far exceeds the program's current funding.

Governor Josh Shapiro's 2025-2026 budget proposal includes \$12.5 million for the WEDnetPA training program to increase the number of skilled workers in the Commonwealth and close critical workforce gaps.

Gardners, PA – Today, Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) **Secretary Rick Siger** and local leaders visited the [Rice Fruit Company](#) in Gardners, Adams County, to highlight the Shapiro Administration's commitment to investing in Pennsylvania's workers. Building on that commitment, **Governor Josh Shapiro's 2025-2026 proposed budget invests \$12.5 million in the [WEDnetPA](#) program.**

Created by DCED more than 25 years ago and made available through the Workforce and Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania, WEDnetPA provides funds to qualified employers to train new and existing employees. The training must be skill-building for an employee's current job or for an advancement or promotion.

Governor Shapiro's proposed investment in the program creates a dedicated funding source for WEDnetPA and increases the program's funding to ensure more Pennsylvania businesses have access to the tools they need to train their employees. Demand for the WEDnetPA program is at least double what the current \$8 million in funding can provide. While nearly 500 businesses will receive WEDnetPA assistance this year, there are an additional 250 submitted applications requesting funds – demonstrating the need for additional money to support Pennsylvania companies that prioritize upskilling their workforce.

"With his proposed \$12.5 million investment in WEDnetPA, Governor Shapiro is doubling down on our commitment to making the Commonwealth more competitive and creating economic opportunity for all Pennsylvanians," said **Secretary Rick Siger**. "Expanding WEDnetPA funding will help more businesses like Rice Fruit Company train and increase the skills of their employees while continuing to foster an environment for businesses to thrive, employees to grow, and communities to prosper all across our Commonwealth."

Rice Fruit Company is the largest apple-packing facility in the eastern United States. The company receives, stores, and packs more than 2 million boxes of high-quality fresh Pennsylvania apples annually. WEDnetPA has designated \$30 thousand for Rice Fruit to help cover the cost of a training plan offered by Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) which will upskill

employees in AutoCAD, electrical, supervisory, forklift, lean, and simulation training. Once employees complete the program, WEDnetPA will reimburse the company up to \$30 thousand toward the training cost.

“The WEDnetPA grant has been instrumental in supporting our workforce development initiatives with funding to offer employees the tools and skills needed to thrive in today’s workplace,” said **Ben Rice, President, Rice Fruit Company**. “The strong partnership between Rice Fruit Company and HACC was fundamental in identifying tailored and strategic educational training that will equip our workforce for long-term success in today’s competitive environment. We value this support from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and the ability to provide development to employees to grow their work skills.”

Over the past 26 years, the WEDnetPA program has provided training to over 1.3 million employees at more than 23,000 Pennsylvania businesses.

“WEDnetPA has consistently proven to be an invaluable asset for Pennsylvania businesses, empowering our workforce through targeted training and skill development,” said **Representative Torren Ecker**. “Initiatives like this help our communities remain competitive, vibrant, and resilient. This is especially true here in Adams County, where local businesses like Rice Fruit Company play an essential role in sustaining quality jobs and fostering economic prosperity.”

“For Pennsylvania to have a robust economy, it’s necessary to invest in its workers. WEDnetPA has been doing that for more than two decades,” said **Representative Dan Moul**. “This training not only helps Pennsylvania workers and our fruit farmers, but it also strengthens our communities and enhances the lives of those who live here.”

“WEDnetPA was created to support Pennsylvania businesses. Rice Fruit Company’s remarkable training plan provides a perfect example of the extensive time and financial investment companies are making to upskill their workforce,” said **Shannon Munro, Executive Program Officer, WEDnetPA**. “By providing access to training funds and resources, we help ensure that companies like Rice Fruit can enhance the skills of their employees, boost productivity, and remain competitive. Together, we are building a stronger, more skilled workforce that will drive Pennsylvania’s economic growth for years to come.”

Since day one, **Governor Shapiro and his Administration** have been committed to making Pennsylvania a leader in economic development, job creation, and innovation. The 2024-25 enacted budget made significant investments aligned with the overall 10-year [Economic Development Strategy](#).

The Governor’s proposed 2025-26 budget goes further to implement the strategy, calling for over \$160 million in total new and expanded investments to implement the economic development strategy, increase Pennsylvania’s competitiveness, strengthen communities, and address critical housing needs.

In addition to the \$12.5 million proposed for WEDnetPA, the budget also includes:

- **\$2 million** for the creation of Career Connect to build internships at Pennsylvania companies
- **\$50 million** to strengthen the innovation ecosystem and spur life science job growth

- **\$10 million** for AdvancePA tax credits to create high quality jobs across PA
- **\$50 million** investment in Housing Stock Restoration
- **\$10 million** increase for the Act 47 Distressed Municipalities Program to support communities in financial recovery

Read more about [Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 budget proposal](#). Explore the Governor's 2025-26 Budget in Brief [here](#), or visit shapirobudget.pa.gov to learn more.

For more information about the WEDnetPA program or DCED, visit the agency's [website](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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