



Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

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Contact: Shannon Powers, 717-603-2056 or shpowers@pa.gov

Shapiro Administration Partners with Penn State to Launch New Center for Plant Excellence, Driving Innovation in Pennsylvania's Plant-Based Ag Sector

Manheim, PA – Today, **Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding** and **Pennsylvania State University College of Agricultural Sciences Dean Dr. Troy Ott** launched the new **Center for Plant Excellence**, an initiative aimed at advancing research, innovation, and business growth in Pennsylvania's diverse, plant-based ag sector.

Governor Josh Shapiro secured funding for the new center in his first budget to help drive economic growth by fostering collaboration, investing in research, and equipping businesses with the resources they need to compete. The center, with a \$500,000 investment from the **Shapiro Administration**, will be led by the PSU Southeast Research Center.

"This center will enhance Pennsylvania's global competitiveness by combining forces of some of our strongest agriculture producers with our world class land-grant university," said **Secretary Redding**. "Penn State's deep well of expertise and innovative research and the collective power of interrelated businesses will help ensure that Pennsylvania stays at the cutting edge. This partnership is a great opportunity to build a brighter future for the state's farmers, producers, and economy."

The Penn State Southeast Research Center (SEAREC) is the university's hub for applied field research in south-central Pennsylvania. SEAREC tests and refines innovative ideas from Penn State labs before introducing them to local growers, supporting farms and allied industries with practical, research-based solutions to boost productivity and sustainability.

Forest products, ornamental plants, apples, grapes, and other specialty food crops are among the products that secure Pennsylvania's position as a national agriculture leader. These and other plant-based industries contribute an estimated \$52.7 billion annually to our state economy, according to the 2021 Pennsylvania Agriculture Economic Impact Study. Despite their vital economic role, the state's plant industries have lacked a centralized, coordinated effort for growth and innovation. The new **Center for Plant Excellence** will address this gap and provide the dedicated resources needed to accelerate advancements in plant science, production, and processing.

The center will focus on key areas including research and development, supply chain and market development, new high-value product design, and consumer safety. Its efforts will support a broad range of plant industries across Pennsylvania, from fruits and vegetables to specialty crops such as hemp, hops, and tree nuts, as well as bioproducts and biofuels. The Center will also provide critical infrastructure development for processing and new technologies that will drive economic growth and enhance the sustainability of the state's plant industries.

"We are grateful for the leadership from the Department of Agriculture and Secretary Redding for allowing the College of Agricultural Sciences to administer the Center for Plant Excellence. The CPE reflects our shared commitment to advancing Pennsylvania's plant industries through research, collaboration and strategic investment," said **Dean Ott**. "With collaboration between the College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State Extension and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, we will ensure a healthy and vibrant future for growers, businesses and communities across the state. Pennsylvania's plant industries rely on one another — thriving forests provide a foundation for nurseries, while ornamental plants support pollinators vital to agriculture. The Center for Plant Excellence enhances this network by encouraging innovation and bringing industry experts together, ensuring adaptability, environmental stewardship, and lasting economic prosperity."

The center will leverage existing partnerships with producer groups, academic institutions, and public and private sector stakeholders to create a comprehensive approach to improving plant production and processing. Funding for the center will support programming, partnerships, and statewide events aimed at advancing the plant industry, and it will be overseen by a board of directors that includes diverse agricultural stakeholders.

The Center for Plant Excellence follows the success of the Commonwealth's existing Centers for Animal Excellence, which have been essential in supporting the dairy, beef, and poultry industries for years.

Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 budget invests to continue Pennsylvania's national legacy as an agriculture leader by proposing:

- An additional **\$13 million** in the Ag Innovation Program to help build the future of American agriculture right here in Pennsylvania. In its first open application period, the Ag Innovation Program received 159 applications for nearly \$70 million worth of innovation projects.
- Continued support for the [Center for Livestock and Poultry Excellence](#), Center for Beef Excellence, and the [Center for Dairy Excellence](#), critical partners in providing equipment, personnel, training, and research funding for Pennsylvania's response to the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus outbreak.

- Continued support for poultry producers to help them recover losses from Highly Pathogenic Avian influenza and improve biosecurity on their farms with the nation's only HPAI recovery fund. With \$13.5 million in grants distributed and applications open for a sixth round, **\$61.5 million** in funds remain for use in 2025-26.

These investments are crucial for the future of Pennsylvania agriculture. By supporting family farms and the infrastructure and workforce they need to thrive, the Governor is helping to build a more resilient agricultural economy, safeguard the food supply, and secure a prosperous future for Pennsylvania communities.

Read more about commonsense investments to keep Pennsylvania agriculture competitive and thriving in Governor Josh Shapiro's 2025-26 budget proposal at shapirobudget.pa.gov.

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