



Pennsylvania
Department of Agriculture



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Department of Labor & Industry

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Contact: Shannon Powers, Agriculture 717-603.2056; shpowers@pa.gov
Trevor J. Monk, L&I, dlipress@pa.gov

Shapiro Administration Names Farmworkers of the Year, Honoring Workers Critical to Pennsylvania's Economy and Food Security

Aspers, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Secretary of Labor & Industry Nancy A. Walker joined PA State Council of Farm Organizations President Kimberly Paley at Adams County Nursery in Aspers to honor three critical food industry workers as Pennsylvania Farmworkers of the Year. Award winners were Adams County Nursery Orchard Laborer Wilson Garcia Deras, Harvest Supervisor Jose Maderas of Leidy's Premium Meats in Souderton, Montgomery County, and Crew Supervisor Jose "Ponce" Cruz of Bonnie Brae Fruit Farms in Gardners, Adams County.

The awards highlight outstanding frontline farm and food-processing employees who work tirelessly to produce a safe, secure food supply, feeding families and local economies across Pennsylvania. The three honorees are among the nearly 600,000 workers who keep Pennsylvania's \$132.5 billion agriculture industry in business.

"Hard-working, skilled, team-players like Wilson, Ponce, and Jose inspire their coworkers to perform extremely well in demanding, difficult jobs to put food on all our tables and keep their employers in business," **Secretary Redding** said. "The **Shapiro Administration** applauds the tremendous contributions agriculture workers, whether they are citizens or guest workers, make to our communities, our economy and to every single one of our daily lives. **Governor Josh Shapiro** has made Pennsylvania agriculture a top priority since day one, recognizing the industry and the workers who keep it running as central to our state's and our nation's economic security."

Workers eligible for the award included frontline field and livestock workers, seasonal workers, meat-packaging, and food-processing workers. Nominees were selected for their initiative, determination, and positive impact on their coworkers and their employers' daily operations.

Farmworker of the Year Awards underscore Shapiro Administration support for building the skilled workforce Pennsylvania farmers need to grow and sustain their businesses.

Yesterday, **Governor Josh Shapiro** signed a 2025-26 budget that builds on two years of progress under the Shapiro Administration — making historic reforms to address long-standing challenges and make Pennsylvania more competitive for workers and businesses. The Governor's budget expands our workforce, grows our economy, cuts taxes, and reduces costs for hardworking Pennsylvanians, including the nearly 600,000 workers whose jobs support our agriculture industry.

The 2025-26 budget builds on prior years' investments to keep Pennsylvania a national leader in agriculture, including the \$10 million Agriculture Innovation Fund created in 2024-25, and continued investment of \$13 million to support PA Farm Bill programs working to build the skilled workforce ag employers need.

The budget continues to invest in the agricultural workforce through apprenticeships, vo-tech classes, and hands-on education initiatives.

The Shapiro Administration is once again delivering \$183 million funding for career and technical education and apprenticeships — a more than 50 percent increase over when the Governor took office.

"Pennsylvania's farmworkers are the foundation of our food supply and a vital part of our economy," **Secretary Walker said**. "Their dedication, skill, and leadership strengthen not only their workplaces but the communities they call home. Under Governor Shapiro's leadership, we're committed to ensuring that every worker in this industry has access to fair opportunities, strong protections, and pathways to lasting, rewarding careers."

Under Governor Shapiro's leadership, L&I and the Department of Agriculture have partnered to create more [apprenticeship opportunities and training programs](#) in Pennsylvania's agriculture industry. Since the start of the Shapiro Administration, L&I's Apprenticeship and Training Office has supported the creation of 115 new apprenticeships [including four new apprenticeship programs serving the agriculture industry](#) and enrolled nearly 16,868 new apprentices since the Governor took office.

Governor's Shapiro's budget also continues to support Pennsylvania's agricultural sector by assisting poultry farmers affected by high-path avian influenza (HPAI) with testing and flock losses; investing in agricultural innovation, energy, and conservation projects to modernize the industry and attract new agricultural businesses; and supporting a new state veterinary lab in Western Pennsylvania.

This budget includes an **\$11 million increase** for food security, increasing markets for Pennsylvania farmers, who supply the food flowing into the charitable food system. These investments include:

- **\$3 million** for the State Food Purchase Program and **\$1 million** for the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS).
- **\$2 million** for a new State Food Bucks program to supplement SNAP.
- **\$5 million** in new funding to Pennsylvania food banks.

Farmworker of the Year Award winners named today were praised by their colleagues as follows:

“This is not easy work,” said **Leidy’s Human Resources Director Phil McClay**, who nominated **Jose Maderas**, “But Jose continually looks for areas where we can make improvements to our process that enhance efficiencies and that are more ergonomic for our employees. Our company's core values are integrity, quality, respect, safety, and stewardship and Jose displays these values every day. He has improved employee morale by meeting employees where they are and helping them grow in the company”

“We are lucky to have had Ponce with us for four decades,” said **Bonnie Brae Business Manager Sarah Zost** in nominating **Ponce Cruz**. “He knows all the ins and outs of trimming, thinning, picking, and planting. He is always willing to learn new techniques and discuss the best plan of action with farm managers. He takes feedback from employees and advocates for their needs on the job. He will be straight with employees, confidently correct their work, and frankly tell them how to improve. He is patient and kind when people are learning new things, but also willing to tell them when they're not meeting expectations.”

“From day one, Wilson has shown not only an immense gratitude for this job opportunity but pride in every job that he does,” **Adams County Nursery Human Resources Manager Mikel Grimm** said of **Wilson Garcia Deras**, who has been a seasonal guest worker the past four seasons through the H2A Visa program. “He is the type of employee that you don't ever have to worry about the quality of the work he is doing. Apart from his excellence in the field, Wilson has quickly risen to become a respected leader among his peers, both H2A and non-H2A. His infectious smile and unwavering support for every member of our team are what truly set him apart.”

Read more about Shapiro Administration’s [support for Pennsylvania’s agriculture industry](#) and find details of Governor Shapiro’s 2025-26 budget [here](#).

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