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Shapiro Administration Honors Veterans, Service Members, Their Families During Military Appreciation Day at the 2026 PA Farm Show

Veterans in Agriculture Grant Program opens with \$300,000 available for Veteran Farmers and Agribusinesses

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Maj. Gen. John Pippy, Pennsylvania's adjutant general and head of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, honored the service, sacrifice, and leadership of military veterans and active-duty service members during Military Appreciation Day at the 110th Pennsylvania Farm Show.

The dignitaries joined veterans, military families, and Farm Show attendees for a full day of recognition events, including the newly established **Pennsylvania Veteran Ag Entrepreneurship Award** and the popular **Army vs. Navy Cookoff**.

“Pennsylvania’s veterans bring unmatched discipline, innovation, and resilience to agriculture,” **Secretary Redding** said. “Today, we honor not only their service to our nation, but their continued service to our communities — growing our food, strengthening our economy, and sustaining our rural way of life.”

Veterans in Agriculture Recognized

During a morning ceremony, the **Shapiro Administration** recognized an outstanding veteran farmer and agricultural entrepreneur through the **Pennsylvania Veteran Ag Entrepreneurship Award** program.

George Lake, owner of **Thistle Creek Farms** in Warriors Mark, Huntingdon County, received the award for his leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurial success in agriculture.

A 30-year U.S. Marine Corps veteran, Lake has transformed his family’s 600-acre farm, operated since 1919, into a nationally recognized regenerative, pasture-based livestock operation producing a premium grass-fed beef brand. Beyond managing a diversified farm, he mentors fellow producers. Lake exemplifies the award’s mission by combining

military leadership, agricultural innovation, and long-term business sustainability to strengthen Pennsylvania agriculture.

“I think small farms are the backbone of American agriculture, and I’m willing to give in any way that I can to help small farmers succeed,” **Lake** said. “Helping other farms be profitable has become a bit of a passion for me. I’m especially drawn to veterans who want to enter a farming career. I’m aware of how much they were willing to give for our country.”

The **PA Veteran Ag Entrepreneurship Award** honors a veteran-owned agricultural business that demonstrates innovation, diversification, and business growth, while showing strong leadership and service within the veteran and local communities. Awardees are recognized for responsible stewardship through conservation-minded and climate-smart practices, as well as for creating local jobs and strengthening regional food systems. The award also highlights businesses that align with the **Agriculture Business Development Center’s** priorities, including sound financial planning, risk management, and long-term viability.

In addition, Secretary Redding announced that \$300,000 would be available in the next round of the Veterans in Agriculture Grants Program. This program provides funding to veteran-serving organizations, which then award mini-grants (typically up to \$15,000) to military veterans to start or expand farm operations and related agricultural businesses. These grants help cover costs like equipment, planning, safety, working capital, and business development to make veteran-led farms more profitable and sustainable. The grant application window will be open from January 30 to March 13, 2026.

The continuous partnership between state government agencies has ensured these programs remain successful.

The Shapiro Administration supports veteran farmers through the Homegrown by Heroes program, in collaboration with the Farmer Veteran Coalition and the PA Preferred program. Homegrown by Heroes helps farmer-veterans sell their locally grown products and connects consumers to a tangible way to support veteran-owned farms.

“These programs reflect Pennsylvania’s commitment to ensuring veterans have the tools and support they need to succeed in agriculture,” said **Maj. Gen. Pippy**. “Our service members continue to lead—both in uniform and in the fields that help feed our nation.”

Army vs. Navy Cookoff Showcases Friendly Rivalry

Military Appreciation Day continued with a spirited Army vs. Navy Cookoff at the PA Preferred® Culinary Connection Stage, featuring Army Sgt. Nicolas Adame and Navy Culinary Specialist Second Class Jonathan Ortiz.

The chefs competed head-to-head using Pennsylvania-grown ingredients, highlighting the connection between the Commonwealth's agricultural producers and the military's commitment to nutrition, readiness, and excellence.

Judges, including John Moeller, former White House chef, Barry Crumlich, executive chef of the Pennsylvania Governor's Residence, Maj. Gen. Pippy and Maj. Gen. Terrence L. Koudelka, Jr., Deputy Adjutant General-Air and Commander, Pennsylvania Air National Guard, declared that the Army branch was the winner, drawing enthusiastic applause from veterans, families, and Farm Show visitors.

Honoring Service All Day Long

Military Appreciation Day at the PA Farm Show also included recognition of veterans throughout the complex, special programming honoring military families, discounts on purchases, and opportunities for attendees to learn more about veteran-focused agricultural resources and services.

Attendees were also invited to slow down and smile during Puppy Snuggling, a heartwarming experience that paired playful pups with a powerful purpose. For a small donation, visitors could cuddle and connect with puppies while supporting Dog T.A.G.S., a nonprofit organization that trains service dogs for veterans. The event not only brought joy and comfort to guests of all ages, but also helped raise critical funds to support veterans as they build life-changing partnerships with their future service animals.

The 2026 Farm Show – Pennsylvania State Fair™ – runs Saturday, January 10 through Saturday, January 17, 2026. The theme, *Growing a Nation*, celebrates Pennsylvania's critical role in shaping the United States through agriculture. It highlights how the Commonwealth's farming heritage helped feed the early nation and continues to drive economic growth, innovation, and community through its agriculture and food industries.

The Farm Show is the official kickoff for a year of America250PA commemorations celebrating the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. America250PA emphasizes Pennsylvania's pivotal place in U.S. history as one of the original 13 colonies and its contributions to the nation's founding, democratic traditions, and future prosperity.

The Pennsylvania Farm Show draws scores of visitors to our capital city every January to connect with the people and products who make Pennsylvania agriculture great. The largest indoor agricultural expo in the nation, the Farm Show features nearly 5,000 animals, 12,000-plus competitive entries from more than 4,600 competitors, plus more than 250 commercial exhibits, and hundreds of educational and entertaining events. Admission is free. Parking is \$15 per vehicle.

Pennsylvania's State Fair showcases top competitors from 108 county and local fairs, the diversity and quality of Pennsylvania's agriculture industry, the innovative people who make it thrive, and the faces of our proud past and promising future. The show offers visitors a look at the industry that supports 593,000 Pennsylvania jobs and contributes \$132.5 billion to the state's economy each year.

Hours, a [daily schedule of events](#), [maps](#), and additional information to help visitors enjoy the show are available at farmshow.pa.gov under the 2026 Farm Show section.

Note: Photos and video from the events will be available at [pacast.com](#).

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