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Agriculture Secretary Tours Rice Fruit Company to See How Shapiro Administration Agricultural Innovation Grants Are Helping Businesses ‘Get Stuff Done’

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding toured Adams County family-owned **Rice Fruit Company**, where robotic equipment was purchased with \$130,000 in support from the nation’s first [**Agricultural Innovation Grant Program**](#). The new, state-of-the-art system has helped modernize operations for the 112-year-old business, increasing speed and efficiency and lowering costs for one of Pennsylvania’s leading apple producers.

“Rice Fruit Company is one of the reasons Pennsylvania continues to be a national leader, known for producing the finest apples anywhere,” said **Sec. Redding**. “Helping families like the Rices compete and grow their businesses is the reason the **Shapiro Administration** launched Ag Innovation Grants. This investment is working across Pennsylvania improving lives and helping family businesses get stuff done.”

In its first year, the Agricultural Innovation Grant Program received an overwhelming response with more than \$68 million in funding requests for an available \$10 million in grants. [**Eighty-eight projects funded in the first round**](#) include technologies that are working across the state to improve on-farm and processing efficiency, generate renewable energy while reducing nutrient waste, and support crops and practices that store carbon or replace non-renewable resources.

In January 2026, [**Governor Josh Shapiro invited eligible agriculture businesses**](#) to apply for a **second \$10 million round of grants** funded in his 2025-26 bipartisan budget. Applications will be accepted until 11:59 p.m. on April 18, 2026.

Due to overwhelming response and success, the Governor’s 2026-27 proposed budget includes a **\$9 million increase** for the **Agricultural Innovation Grant Program**, **including \$7 million in base grant funding and \$2 million for a county biodigester pilot project**.

The state-of-the-art manufacturing technology supported by the grant to Rice Fruit Company is an apple-bin tipper system — a solution that addresses specific challenges the company’s apple packing operation faces. The more compact, efficient system improves product quality, enhances food safety, and reduces wastewater volume and

treatment requirements. In addition to addressing labor efficiency, the system improves working conditions for employees, reducing injury risks, and increasing job satisfaction.

“The new robotic apple-bin tipper has been a significant improvement,” **Rice Fruit Company President Ben Rice** said. “Automated operation of easy-to-clean, long-lasting stainless components has reduced downtime, decreased maintenance costs, supported a reliable two-shift operation, and improved overall labor efficiency while also increasing speeds by 25%.”

Since taking office in 2022, **Governor Josh Shapiro** has demonstrated that he understands that Pennsylvania’s economic success depends on our rural communities and farms. Pennsylvania agriculture supports **over 48,800 farms, nearly 600,000 jobs, and contributes \$132.5 billion annually** to the Commonwealth’s economy.

Agriculture is one of the cornerstones of **Governor Shapiro’s Economic Development Strategy** — Pennsylvania’s first in two decades — and the Shapiro Administration is committed to investing in its continued growth.

Read more about investments to keep Pennsylvania agriculture competitive and thriving in Governor Shapiro’s 2026-‘27 budget proposal and continued support for Pennsylvania farmers at pa.gov/governor.

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