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Shapiro Administration Highlights Strategic Investments in Women in Agriculture During Women’s History Month and U.N. Year of the Woman Farmer

In honor of Women’s History Month and the United Nations’ International Year of the Woman Farmer, the Shapiro Administration is celebrating the more than 31,000 women who are driving Pennsylvania agriculture, while highlighting strategic state investments that support their leadership, farm management, and long-term success across the Commonwealth.

Harrisburg, PA — In recognition of International Women’s History Month and the United Nations’ designation of the International Year of the Woman Farmer, **Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding** and **PA Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Minority Chair Senator Judy Schwank** visited **Willow Run Farmstead** to highlight state investments that support recognize the women who are helping power Pennsylvania’s agriculture industry and strengthen rural communities across the Commonwealth.

“Women have long been leaders in Pennsylvania agriculture — managing farms, making key business decisions, and shaping the future of our industry,” **said Secretary Redding**. “Investments like the Farm Vitality Grant Program help farm families plan for the future and ensure the next generation of producers has the support they need to keep Pennsylvania agriculture strong.”

The **Pennsylvania Farm Vitality Grant Program** helps farmers strengthen the future of their operations by providing funding for professional planning services such as business planning, diversification, and farm transition planning. By connecting farmers with technical experts, the program helps farm families navigate complex decisions and build long-term sustainability. These grants can be especially valuable for women in agriculture, who often play key roles in farm management and succession planning but may face additional barriers to accessing capital or technical resources.

Deanne Weber and her family at Willow Run Farmstead used a **\$7,296 Farm Vitality Grant** to support the transition of their farm to her, helping ensure the operation can continue serving their community and contributing to Pennsylvania’s agricultural economy for years to come while keeping women actively involved in the future of the farm. Deanne is the owner and sole operator of Willow Run Farmstead, a third

generation preserved farm that raises beef for direct-to-consumer sales, with strong on-farm sustainability and conservation measures.

"As a beginning woman farmer, county, state, and federal programs were essential in helping me get my operation off the ground," said **Deanne Weber**. "The grants I received provided critical early financial support, and the experienced professionals I worked with offered guidance that was just as valuable as the funding itself. As I gain experience farming, I continue to look for ways I can give back to my community, supporting other women farmers and making space for connection, mentorship, and the kind of knowledge-sharing that strengthens us all."

Today, women make up 35 percent of Pennsylvania's agricultural producers, representing a growing and vital part of the state's \$132.5 billion agriculture sector. Across the Commonwealth, 31,135 women are actively involved in agriculture — managing farms, making business decisions, and helping lead the next generation of producers.

Among Pennsylvania's women in agriculture:

- 1,282 serve as hired farm managers
- 26,156 are operators who live on the farms they manage
- 4,227 are under age 35 — helping Pennsylvania rank #1 in the nation for young agricultural producers
- 24,906 — nearly 80 percent — are involved in day-to-day farm management decisions
- Women represent a growing share of the agricultural labor force, rising to 26.4% of hired farmworkers nationally
- 54% of employees at the PA Department of Agriculture are women, compared to the Commonwealth average of 42.4%.

"Pennsylvania's women farmers are innovators, entrepreneurs, and stewards of our land," said **State Senator Judy Schwank**, Minority Chair of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. "As we celebrate International Women's Day and the International Year of the Woman Farmer, it's important that we continue supporting policies and programs that help women succeed in agriculture and ensure the long-term strength of our rural communities."

Pennsylvania is cultivating the next generation of women leaders in agriculture through education and hands-on experience. At **Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences**, two-thirds of students are women, reflecting a powerful shift in who is entering and shaping the future of the industry. Leadership programs also reflect this trend: the state's **FFA State Officer team** is predominantly female, and organizations like **Pasa Sustainable Agriculture** provide apprenticeship programs that give women real-world training and experience in sustainable farming practices.

"Women farmers are playing a critical role in building resilient farms and food systems across Pennsylvania," said **Pasa Sustainable Agriculture Executive Director Hannah Kinney Smith**. "From managing day-to-day operations to making key business

and conservation decisions, women are driving innovation and growth in agriculture. Supporting farmers through education, mentorship, collaboration, and smart public investments helps ensure that women entering agriculture today have the tools, resources, and opportunities to succeed. These efforts not only strengthen individual farms but also contribute to thriving rural communities and a sustainable food system for generations to come.”

Across the Commonwealth, women farmers are not only feeding communities — they are leading businesses, managing land responsibly, mentoring young producers, and driving the future of agriculture. These combined educational, leadership, and apprenticeship opportunities are helping ensure that more women can enter, thrive, and lead in Pennsylvania agriculture.

The **Shapiro Administration** is strengthening Pennsylvania agriculture through investments that support farmers, expand opportunities for women in the industry, and help ensure the long-term success of farm families and rural communities across the Commonwealth. These efforts include:

- Inclusion of women in agriculture’s perspectives in the **Governor’s Advisory Commission on Women’s** forthcoming State of the Woman Report, a comprehensive, data-driven effort to assess the status of women across Pennsylvania
- Investments in the next generation of agricultural leaders through the **PA Farm Bill’s** programs, such as **Ag & Youth** and **Farm to School**
- Creating opportunities in historically underserved communities through programs like the PA Farm Bill’s **Urban Ag Grant Program**
- Expanding workforce training and career and technical education opportunities
- Increasing funding for food security programs, where households with children are more likely to experience food insecurity
- Addressing the childcare workforce shortage through workforce recruitment and retention grants

The **Governor’s Advisory Commission on Women** digital survey is open through May 30 and will collect insight from Pennsylvania women on their experiences and priorities to better inform the Administration’s policies that impact women. The digital survey is available for interested Pennsylvanians at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/stateofthewoman>.

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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