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Pennsylvania Ag Secretary Tours Columbia County Orchard to Highlight Investments in Local Farms and Fresh, Affordable Food for Pennsylvania Families

Two million dollars in Fresh Food Financing Initiative grants and \$10 million in Agricultural Innovation Program grants are available to support family farms, healthier communities, and stronger local food supply chains across Pennsylvania.

The Shapiro Administration is investing in proven, effective solutions to help farmers innovate, expand, and manage increasing costs and uncertainty triggered by federal actions.

Bloomsburg, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding toured [OHF Orchards](#) in Bloomsburg today to see how Shapiro Administration investments are helping the veteran-run business grow their bottom line and feed their community. The **PA Preferred®** fruit business received **\$99,536** in a 2025 Pennsylvania **Fresh Food Financing Initiative** (FFFI) grant, along with more than **\$125,000 in combined support** from other initiatives that are helping them expand cold storage, boost profits, and meet local demand for their apples.

“While costs are rising for farmers and families alike, Pennsylvania is investing to help consumers recognize and access fresh, locally produced food, and keep more dollars right here, in the pockets of farmers and families, making our economy stronger,” **Secretary Redding** said. “Giving farmers the help they need to shorten their supply chains, lower their costs, and sustain their businesses is one of the many ways the **Shapiro Administration** is creating opportunities for Pennsylvania families and the farmers who feed them to thrive.”

At the orchard, **Sec. Redding** announced that applications are now open for the second round of FFFI grants now and up to \$2 million will be available. In 2024, **Governor Josh Shapiro** signed legislation enabling the **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture** to revive FFFI, a COVID-era initiative to strengthen the capacity of local food supply chains. Since then, Governor Shapiro has secured **\$6 million for the program** and the Department has invested [\\$3.4 million into strengthening local markets for fresh, locally sourced food](#) across 23 counties.

Grocery stores, neighborhood co-ops, mobile markets, farm markets, and other businesses that provide fresh food directly to consumers are eligible to apply. Businesses [located in food deserts](#) — areas designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as having limited access to fresh food — are given priority consideration, as well as women-, minority-, and veteran-owned businesses.

Learn more about eligibility for the [Fresh Food Financing Initiative, Pennsylvania Agricultural Innovation Grants](#) and other funding and support for Pennsylvania's nation-leading agricultural industry at pa.gov/agriculture.

Farm businesses face numerous challenges — including ever-increasing expenses — in getting their goods to market. Costs for cold storage, delivery vehicles, food safety measures, and retail space are among them. Federal funding cuts, cancelled contracts, as well as actions that have increased fuel, fertilizer, and equipment costs are magnifying these challenges, straining budgets, and creating uncertainty for farmers, their supply chains, and customers alike. Through the Fresh Food Financing Initiative, the **Shapiro Administration** is investing in proven, effective solutions to these challenges by supporting family farms by strengthening local food supply chains and building profitable markets for farmers in Pennsylvania.

Standing Up for Pennsylvania Farmers, Families and Local Food Access

Governor Shapiro and his Administration have consistently stood up for farmers and families, taking decisive actions to protect Pennsylvania's food system and agricultural economy, and investing its future.

In 2025, when the USDA abruptly canceled Pennsylvania's **Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) agreement, cutting \$13 million in federal funding** for foodbanks to purchase fresh food from local farmers, the Governor [filed a lawsuit](#). The case is still pending.

In addition to [taking swift emergency actions](#) in response to federal funding cuts, Governor Shapiro has steadily increased funding for food assistance programs that feed low-income families and increase markets for local farmers. In his first two years in office, the Governor increased funding for the **State Food Purchase Program (SFPP)** by \$2 million, bringing total two-year funding to \$26.6 million. Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 budget included an **\$11 million increase** for food security, an increase he calls for sustaining in his proposed budget for 2026-27:

- **\$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.

Helping Farmers Expand, Innovate, Thrive

In addition to the \$99,536 FFFI grant, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture awarded OHF Orchards **\$116,689 in the first \$10 million round of Agricultural Innovation Grants** to support innovative solutions for orchard management and fruit production. Pennsylvania's Ag Innovation Grant Program is the first initiative in the nation to support innovation in the ag industry, and [OHF's project is among 88 innovative projects in 45 counties](#) helping farmers adopt new technologies, expand production, protect soil and water resources, improve efficiency, and generate clean, renewable energy. **The Department is also accepting applications for the second \$10 million round of Ag Innovation grants until April 18, 2026.**

With the help of a [\\$40,495 Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Grant](#), which the department awarded in 2025 using Biden-era federal funds, OHF purchased bins to minimize spoilage and improve efficiency.

[PA Preferred® membership is giving OHF Orchards a trusted brand](#), that shows customers they are truly Pennsylvania farmers, adhering to high standards in the fruit they produce.

“The veterans we work with, like Joe O'Hara, benefit greatly from grants funded with federal dollars and through the PA Farm Bill,” **PA Veteran Farming Network Executive Director Mimi Thomas-Brooker** said. “OHF Orchards is a living demonstration that Pennsylvanian's tax dollars supporting veteran-owned farms is good business, and good for their communities. We're proud to partner with Secretary Redding, Governor Shapiro, and the legislature in getting projects like Mr. O'Hara's on the ground.”

Pennsylvania agriculture supports **over 48,800 farms, nearly 600,000 jobs, and contributes \$132.5 billion annually** to the Commonwealth's economy. Since taking office in 2023, **Governor Shapiro** has demonstrated that he understands that Pennsylvania's economic success depends on our rural communities and farms.

Governor Shapiro's 2026-'27 budget proposal furthers long-term agricultural growth and resilience by:

- Increasing the nation's only Ag Innovation Program to \$19 million to help build the future of American agriculture right here in Pennsylvania
- Fully funding the Pennsylvania Farm Bill to support business planning, infrastructure, and workforce development
- Funding a new state-of-the-art animal health laboratory in Western Pennsylvania
- Continuing the Fresh Food Financing Initiative to expand access to local food and support small businesses
- Legalizing adult use cannabis to open a new market for farmers

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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