

Presentation by:

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Barnyard Discussion: Issues Driving the State of
Pennsylvania Agriculture

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Good Afternoon. My name is Brenda Shambaugh and I am the Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD). Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today concerning the state of agriculture in PA.

PACD represents 66 conservation districts across the commonwealth. Each district is led by a voluntary local board of directors who prioritize their county's conservation needs. The goal for all 66 districts is to preserve and protect our natural resources. The conservation districts work in partnership with federal and state agencies, private organizations and individuals to participate in a wide range of agricultural and urban interests and programs. Their activities are numerous and include water watershed protection, erosion and sedimentation pollution control, agricultural assistance, forest and wildlife management, abandoned mine reclamation and dirt and gravel road improvement to name just a few.

Chesapeake Bay

Earlier today, Nikki Kasi from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Chesapeake Bay Office provided the Pennsylvania House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees with a comprehensive overview of the Commonwealth's Chesapeake Bay Program. The goal of the program is to meet the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reduction requirements for nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment loads going into the Bay. Approximately one and a half years ago, Pennsylvania's conservation districts within the Bay watershed were asked to conduct farm inspections to determine whether or not the farm operator has a working manure management plan and an erosion and sedimentation plan. Collectively to date, conservation districts have inspected over 1570 farms in the Bay watershed. If the inspected farm did not have either one of those plans, the conservation district assisted the farmer to develop and implement them. As a result, the conservation district workload increased substantially, but the bottom line is more manure management and erosion and sedimentation plans are being developed.

Integrated Compliance Information System (ICIS)

In January 2017, EPA began requiring electronic reporting for inspections, violations, and enforcement actions. Conservation districts suddenly were forced to electronically report to EPA the same information they report to DEP, but in a totally different format. The system is extremely cumbersome, is user unfriendly and wastes valuable technician time. There is no



reason for this duplication of effort. In essence, the new reporting has no positive impact on the improvement or protection of our natural resources. There has to be a way to provide the information to EPA through the reporting districts already provide to DEP.

Farm Bill

Congress has begun the process of developing a new Farm Bill and contemplating the funding necessary to implement the bill. PACD strongly believes in the locally led, voluntary, incentive-based model for addressing natural resource concerns, not a one-size-fits all regulatory scheme. Farm Bill conservation programs should begin at the local level and be resource driven with sufficient flexibility to direct funding to local priorities and concerns.

Strong mandatory funding levels authorized in the next Farm Bill are fundamental to putting conservation on the ground. The Conservation Title (Title II) took a 10% cut in funding in the Agricultural Act of 2014, and continues to be cut annually during the appropriations process. Each Farm Bill conservation program plays a significant role in addressing natural resource concerns. Robust mandatory funding is critical for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program (SWRP), and the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program to ensure best conservation practices on the ground. Since every dollar cut from federal conservation programs leads directly to less conservation on the ground, at a minimum, no further cuts to the Conservation Title should occur in the next farm bill.

Conservation is a vital tool for a viable agricultural industry. In order to stay productive, agricultural operations need to have a strong safety net, vigorous marketing opportunities and a supportive farm policy. The Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) annually provides over \$33 million to Pennsylvania for technical assistance and conservation planning, which is a critical tool and first step in evaluating a producer's resource needs. NRCS, along with conservation districts, helps agricultural producers plan and apply conservation practices on the land. The long standing partnership between NRCS and Pennsylvania's conservation districts needs to remain strong to assist our Commonwealth's number one industry.

On a related note, proposed reductions in EPA funding for the next federal fiscal year will quickly translate in funding cuts for Pennsylvania's conservation districts. Currently, EPA provides nearly \$5.8 million for the Chesapeake Bay Program and 319 Non-Point Source



Program that support conservation district projects. By significantly cutting the EPA budget, Congress will also be hindering Pennsylvania's efforts to improve our water quality.

Clean Water Farm Award Program and Proposed Pennsylvania Agricultural Recognition Program

The Clean Water Farm Award Program recognizes Pennsylvania farmers whose exemplary farm management practices result in improved local and downstream water quality. This award is annually given to six farms in Pennsylvania. Financial support for this award is provided by DEP through the Chesapeake Bay Regulatory and Accountability Program and the Pennsylvania Chesapeake Bay Education Office, which is administered by PACD.

Pennsylvania is now in the process of developing new and creative incentives to further encourage a high bar of conservation beyond compliance for the agricultural community. We envision a new agricultural certification program to recognize and reward producers who have implemented conservation practices above existing regulatory requirements. The proposed program, which is still being developed by state agencies and stakeholders, will be voluntary in nature. The most fundamental requirement for this new agricultural conservation recognition program will be for the operation to be in compliance with the Commonwealth's Agricultural Erosion and Sediment Pollution Control Program requirements and the Commonwealth's Manure and Nutrient Management Program requirements. The program will use the "Plus" concept, which will require the farm operation that is seeking certification and recognition to implement one or more BMPs above and beyond baseline compliance.

In conclusion, PA agriculture is a thriving, viable industry and farmers are continuously putting conservation practices on their land. Congress can assist the farming community by developing and passing a practical farm bill with sufficient funding to make Pennsylvania's number one industry sustainable for generations to come. Through the measures outlined above, Pennsylvania landowners can provide food and fiber for people around the world while implementing conservation practices on Pennsylvania land that ensure clean water, healthy soil and other vital benefits on which the public relies each day.

