

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Wednesday, February 26, 2025



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) Secretary Russell Redding and senior PDA staff testified before the House Appropriations Committee this afternoon. The House Republicans focused their questions on increasing transparency around grant awards from the department as its portfolio of funding opportunities has grown. Members are concerned that the Administration is using PDA to support politically advantageous programs while losing focus on helping traditional farming operations that are the backbone of the agriculture industry.

Key Takeaways:

- Committee members expressed concerns that increased investments in Pennsylvania's agriculture programs are not necessarily having their desired effect.
 - As the governor's policies shift PDA into more of a grant award agency, members shared concerns the department needs to add more transparency to grant applications and awards.
- The governor's proposal, which calls for cutting Centers of Excellence in key areas of agriculture, has raised significant concerns among committee members about potential negative impacts on the agriculture industry.
- Avian Influenza has reached Pennsylvania, causing havoc for commercial and small farms. Members expressed concerns that the cuts in the budget for the Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission are ill-timed given the current crisis. The secretary assured the committee that PDA has the resources needed to combat avian flu.
- Members shared concerns with the governor's recreational marijuana program taking away from the other important work PDA should be focused on. One concerning discovery is that while the State Police have not been consulted regarding the governor's plan for recreational marijuana, PDA has, raising questions regarding the administration's priorities in crafting this proposal.
- Regarding Pennsylvania's crisis in the availability of veterinarians, committee members asked PDA leaders how they plan on addressing this with their budget request for their new Veterinary Training and Services Grants.
 - Members pressed the PDA secretary to admit that while this will now be a competitive grant to avoid the non-preferred appropriations process for the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, they are currently the only school eligible for the grant.
- Committee members also questioned the PDA secretary on how they are supporting agricultural digesters, a significant initiative that creates energy resources from agricultural byproducts.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Ann Flood asks what is being done to help with avian flu outbreaks around the Commonwealth.



Rep. Torren Ecker discusses PDA's process for awarding grants and calls for transparency in the process.



Rep. Marci Mustello discusses PDA investments in digesters and their potential uses in Pennsylvania's agriculture and energy industries.