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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Supporting Local Agriculture

Wednesday, March 2nd, 2022 | 12:00 p.m.

60 East Wing and Virtual

Representative Emily Kinkead

12:10 p.m.

Don Mahaney, Owner
Scratch & Co.

Alisa Fava-Fasnacht
Emerald Valley Artisans, LLC

Q & A with Legislators

12:40 p.m.

Jane Clements, CEO
Feeding Pennsylvania

Q & A with Legislators

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Testimony for the PA House Democratic Policy Committee on Supporting Local Agriculture

What we are trying to rebuild is a healthy foodshed, one that provides nutrient-dense foods from local farms to local populations in increasing quantity.

Small farms need better infrastructure if they are going to compete against large farms, as everyone knows. But the impact of this infrastructure is much greater. Small farms being able to grow properly diverse crops throughout the growing season to a more educated public that (we know) cares more and more about the impact of their food on their bodies is not enough. We need for them to do so in quantities required to feed Pennsylvanians without us relying so much on a waste-ridden stream of nutrient deficient calories grown at the expense of otherwise naturally biodiverse habitat across the globe, picked early to make it to grocers in a marketable yet nutrient defunct state.

Small farmers would grow more food but too great a share of their remaining market since growing has become industrialized comes in the form of CSAs, farm stands and restaurants. These markets are volatile and costly for farmers to squeeze out a living.

The solution to improved foodshed health that serves small farms comes in two parts:

- a distribution system tailored to local farms so that their crop can make it to the next step in the value chain
- a robust small manufacturing footprint to help farms intentionally grow more foods that will have shelf life extended for upwards of two years, making it such that the risk of growing more crops than were sold via last year's farm stand et al is mitigated.

We are experiencing crises that are environmental, economic, and public health in nature. Securing the health of our foodshed addresses all of these. Concentrating on assuring our small farms are robust and able to provide locally grown and value-added foods to local populations is our first necessary step.

Don Mahaney
Owner, Scratch & Co



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Testimony submitted by
Jane Clements, Chief Executive Officer
Feeding Pennsylvania
to the Democratic Policy Committee
House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
March 2, 2022

On behalf of Feeding Pennsylvania, I welcome this opportunity to speak today about Pennsylvania's charitable food network and our strong and growing relationships with agriculture through the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) which benefits both Pennsylvanians without adequate food and our local farmers and processors. Thank you Chairman Bizzarro and members of the committee for inviting me today.

Feeding Pennsylvania is a partnership formed amongst Pennsylvania's Feeding America member food banks. Our collective effort promotes and aids our members in securing food and other resources to reduce hunger and food insecurity for their communities and across Pennsylvania and provides a shared voice on the issues of hunger and food access. Our nine-member food banks include Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, Community Food Warehouse of Mercer County, Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Helping Harvest, H & J Weinberg Northeast Pennsylvania Regional Food Bank, Philabundance, Second Harvest Food Bank of Lehigh Valley and Northeast Pennsylvania, Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, and Westmoreland Food Bank. These food banks serve nearly 2 million food insecure individuals annually, half a million of whom are children, through a network of more than 3,000 partner agencies - pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other programs that provide emergency food. The food banks rely on both public and private sources of food and funds to help meet the nutritional needs of Pennsylvanians experiencing food insecurity.

Pennsylvania is home to more than 53,000 farms, and produces more than \$7.4 billion in agricultural products. Agricultural production in Pennsylvania – including produce, proteins, eggs, and dairy -- occurs to some degree in virtually every one of the state's 67 counties. The agricultural industry is a leading economic driver in the Commonwealth. However, a vast majority of the agricultural producers tend to be smaller farming operations, which lack the logistics needed to distribute agricultural surplus throughout the state. Data from the National Ag Statistics Services (NASS) supports this claim. Feeding Pennsylvania recognizes large scale agricultural producers are also important contributors to Pennsylvania's agricultural production. Unfortunately, the supply of agricultural surplus is not consistently available between large and small producers throughout the 67 counties in Pennsylvania.

In July of 2020, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) contracted with Feeding Pennsylvania to carry out the provisions of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (Act 113 of 2010). Feeding Pennsylvania contracts with 13 food banks to support the sourcing and distribution of the products in all 67 counties. Funds to acquire food are allocated for each county using the State Food Purchase Program formula, which is determined by data for unemployment, SNAP enrollment, cash assistance, medical assistance, and income. Funds allocated to this program develop and help maintain a system for the Commonwealth's food industry to donate, sell, or otherwise provide food products to the charitable food network within Pennsylvania. Food products acquired under the PASS are to be distributed to low-income individuals and families throughout Pennsylvania. Eligible food industry participants include growers, packers, processors and other entities located

in Pennsylvania, and eligible food products include only commodities grown or produced in Pennsylvania. PASS provides opportunities for farmers and processors to distribute surplus product and recoup their share of the costs for producing, harvesting, packaging, and/or transporting of that product, while in turn increasing access to fresh food for food banks across the Commonwealth. Increased access to fresh food produced in Pennsylvania provides multiple positive health benefits for families facing food insecurity.

PASS funding has covered the cost of getting produce out of the field and bagged, processing surplus milk into cheese and other dairy products, paying for the cartons for surplus eggs, processing meat and putting it into family-size packaging, and even processing produce like apples into apple sauce.

While the PASS program was enacted into law in 2010, the program was not funded until 2015 at \$1 million. Over the last several years, the program has grown to its current appropriation of \$2.5 million, but in 2020, an additional \$10 million in CARES Act funding demonstrated the greater potential of PASS for both the agriculture community and the families in need of emergency food. This funding has resulted in more than 22 million pounds of PA-produced food distributed to households in all 67 counties since 2015.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fragility of our food supply chain. Food banks, as well as retailers, struggled to keep up with the increasing demand for family sized packaged products. Mandates created unnecessary panic, sending people racing to the grocery stores, resulting in a serious food shortage for the charitable food network. Grocery chains, their suppliers and shippers were desperately trying to keep their stores stocked.

At the same time, we saw an enormous amount of food waste across the country as a result of restaurants and schools being closed and a lack of capacity for repackaging of bulk food items. The PASS, with support of the CARES Act dollars, went to work to support agriculture and yield more food for the charitable food network.

During the height of the pandemic, the PASS program provided a reliable stream of revenue to many Pennsylvania farmers and processors, while allowing the charitable food network to provide nutritious Pennsylvania grown food to an unprecedented amount of people coming into our network as a result of restrictions closing many businesses, majority of which were in the service industry. A recent study completed by Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences evaluated the economic impact of the PASS program and found that every \$1 spent through PASS stimulates an additional \$2 in economic activity.

As the PASS program continues to grow, we are proactively pursuing new initiatives to enhance the program by engaging the agriculture community. Feeding Pennsylvania runs a PASS Advisory Committee comprised of agriculture leaders from around the Commonwealth who advise us on ways to innovate and promote the PASS program. Members include:

- Brian Chmiel (Sauder's Eggs)
- Brian Campbell (Brian Campbell Farms)
- Jennifer Reed-Harry (PennAg Industries)
- Lela Reichart (Sterman Masser Potato Farm)
- Chuck Turner (Turner Dairy)
- Steve Johnston (Apple Castle)
- Darryl Jones (Warrington Farms)
- Dave Smith (Pennsylvania Dairymen's Association)

Sourcing a variety of commodities from farmers in all 67 counties and delivering that food to families in all 67 counties is a priority for the PASS program. We continue to evaluate new opportunities such as planned growing to ensure a level of predictability for both the farmer and our food banks in addition to exploring partnerships with people like Don Mahaney to process surplus food into nutritious and culturally appropriate shelf-stable products, but this is only possible with adequate funding and support from the General Assembly. PASS truly is a win-win for Pennsylvania. We look forward to continuing to grow this program to meet the needs of Pennsylvanians through a food system built on Pennsylvania agriculture's strengths and diversity.



Lancaster Farm Fresh Cooperative
201 Running Pump Road
Lancaster, PA 17603

January 25, 2022

I mean, honestly, the farmers to families program really saved us. And then that program got watered down, and all the funds went to the LARGE farms, and the small farms were once again left out of the equation. I know that plan isn't completely sustainable in the long term from the funding side of things. What worries me the most is that the biodiversity on the farms is going to be less and less, and the same old homogenized crops are going to be grown. The chefs are the ones who lead the way in the versatility of crops, seed saving, etc. If it were up to the stores and other consumers, everyone would be growing potatoes, tomatoes, corn, etc. We would lose the niche on the vast variety of items we can grow in the region, which benefits us all. And to clarify, when I say us, I also mean the non-human participants like the soil, animals, insects, plants, fungi, etc. Interestingly enough, it all comes down to education and providing the tools, and access people need to learn how to cook and prepare many varieties of local foods.

For instance, I'm working with a nonprofit to supply our organic local foods to a Latino community in Philadelphia, and we currently have beautiful romaine lettuce we are growing in an unheated greenhouse, but they don't want it; they only use iceberg lettuce (ugh) because that's all they know. Of course, it isn't their fault, and it's the bigger picture, but we can get there; we just need support.

What is that support?

- Funds for help in the areas our business is lacking in
- Staffing and Training
- Education for the community
- Funding to help get the farmers started and funding to help the community eat better
- Education for farmers and how to cook, save seeds, etc.

Once again, we see the same patterns rising up with food insecurities, and the same issues are revolving but not really changing. Looking at this small list, I probably would have said the same thing pre-pandemic too. But it also goes deeper into who our farmers are and why we do what we do. For instance, I work with primarily Amish farmers, and we have had our own challenges with the pandemic. But our number one mission here is to save farmland. At the very least, we can always continue to contribute the mission and then also add on broader things like no dog breeding on farms, no factory farms, reducing animal agriculture with a stronger focus on organic fruit and vegetable production, etc. Which we have accomplished, and I often think that if others could think like that, they could make some realistic small changes and turn them into radically favorable conditions for our community.

The importance of agriculture in the future for all Pennsylvanians should be of the utmost importance. Everyone needs to eat, and everyone needs to eat better.

Casey Spacht
Executive Director