

AG ISSUES UPDATE

Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
February, 2016

State Budget Still In Limbo

On February 2, members from SHAP met with Richard Roush, Dean of the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, at the Mid Atlantic Fruit & Vegetable Conference in Hershey. In addition to exchanging thoughts and ideas about our industry, a meaningful amount of our discussion was devoted to the budget stand-off in Harrisburg.

Without restoring the Land Scrip Fund in PDA's budget, which supports Cooperative Extension and Ag Research, Penn State will most likely be forced to shut down offices of the Cooperative Extension Service across the state. In addition, Ag Research stations, including the Fruit Research & Extension Center in Biglerville, will also be closed.

The consequences of this outcome are too devastating and far-reaching to list. However, there is no question that Research and Extension services have been at the core of our industry's success for many decades. Equally, it cannot be denied that SHAP has been a willing partner in driving critical research and extension projects for generations.

In 2015 alone, our investment of \$223,528 funded 15 research projects using the excellent guidance of the scientists at the Penn State Fruit Research and Extension Center (FREC) in Biglerville, PA. Further, SHAP's Extension Advisory Committee provided \$25,500 in funding for an additional 7 Extension projects, largely handled through our local Cooperative Extension Service.

Moreover, in 2015 SHAP's Endowment Committee donated \$252,000 in funding to build a first class Graduate Housing Project on FREC property adjacent to the Biglerville Borough. The new facility will allow FREC to attract and house high quality graduate level candidates to study and work at the Research Farm in Biglerville. In addition, it will provide an attractive venue to temporarily house visiting scientists who can enhance the research opportunities for the fruit industry in PA.

It seems remarkably anti-climactic that at nearly the same moment Penn State celebrates a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open new Graduate Housing at FREC – the very same housing that SHAP funded in 2015 – the Governor is about to force Penn State to shutter the flagship research institution that supports our industry.

From the community standpoint, programs like 4-H and Master Gardeners would also be discontinued. These programs touch thousands of parents, children, and community members across Pennsylvania.

Our industry needs both Ag Research and Extension Services to continue uninterrupted so that the partnerships we have worked so hard to establish are not destroyed with the stroke of a pen. We need answers to problems like fire blight, BMSB, and Spotted Lanternfly. We need support to meet the challenges of new regulations for food safety. We need on-going research projects to provide the scientific evidence for dealing with water quality issues distorted by FSMA.

So, if you've never picked up the phone, made a visit, or sent an email to anyone in Harrisburg before, now is the time to send a message to Governor Wolf. Tell him that we need the line items for Penn State Ag Research and Cooperative Extension restored. An easy contact form is provided online at <https://governor.pa.gov/contact>. Call the Governor's office at 717-787-2500, or send a

fax to 717-772-8284. Or you can send a letter to Governor Tom Wolf, 508 Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120.

A copy of the letter SHAP sent to the Governor is found elsewhere in this issue. Feel free to use any of the salient points included in that letter for your own message. Just don't fail to make a statement!

Change in Jamaican H-2A Program Made on February 19

On February 3, the State Department announced plans to terminate the visa waiver that has been in existence for H-2A workers from Jamaica. The waiver had been in existence since the 1940s. The reason cited for the change was increased security.

The change will take effect on February 19 at which time all H-2A workers from Jamaica will need to apply for a visa and go through an interview process at the U.S. embassy in Jamaica, just as Mexican H-2A workers always have. USApple is working with other impacted organizations, including the National Council of Agricultural Employers and the New England Apple Association, to ensure the transition is smooth and the Kingston embassy is equipped to handle the increase in visas it will now need to process. (*Apple Bites*, USApple Association, 2.9.16)

Ag Plastics Recycling

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is asking the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to implement an agriculture plastic recycling program. Farm Bureau is concerned that burning of agriculture plastics, a common disposal method used by farmers, may no longer fall under exemptions generally given to the burning of agriculture waste.

There is no formal statewide program for recycling plastics like silage bags, mulch, or drip irrigation. PFB is asking the Department of Agriculture to implement a recycling program similar to one run in New York. There, Cornell University and other state agencies coordinate the pickup of used agriculture plastics.

In the past, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has tolerated the burning of agriculture waste. However, those exemptions cover only agricultural commodities in their "unmanufactured state." Some DEP officials have told farmers that agriculture plastics do not fall under the exemptions for agriculture open burning. However, farmers who have attempted to recycle agriculture products have had them turned away over concerns that they are too dirty to recycle.

"Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is becoming increasingly concerned that our farm families will soon find themselves between a legal rock and a practical hard place," PFB President Rick Ebert said in a letter to the department. "We already have farmers telling us they can no longer legally burn spent plastics and the local recycling programs do not accept spent agricultural plastics."

PFB encouraged the department to look into the Recycling Agricultural Plastics Program (RAPP) implemented in New York. The program uses a mobile baler which collects spent plastics. When the program launched, Cornell University held educational programs for farmers to learn about requirements for product cleanliness. PFB believes the Department of Agriculture is the best option to lead a multi-agency initiative to start a statewide agriculture plastic recycling program.

Farmers Reminded of DMAP Enrollment Deadline

Winter is a good time for farmers to look at their plans for coping with wildlife damage and to consider enrolling in a program that assists with deer damage. Farmers can use the Deer

Management Assistance Program, known as DMAP, to help keep deer populations in check on their land. Unchecked deer populations can cause serious damage to crops. An average deer eats about 2,100 pounds of forage annually. If those deer are feeding on farm crops, it can take a large chunk out of farm income. Hunting is a great way to keep deer populations under control.

The DMAP program allows farmers to control who hunts on their property, or allows the Game Commission to distribute permits through their automated license system. The Pennsylvania Game Commission is again setting a late spring enrollment date for DMAP. **To participate in DMAP, you must enroll by May 1, so now is an excellent time to consider your wildlife management plans.**

In order for farmers to qualify, they must be the owner or lessee of private lands, and must be able to demonstrate that he or she is suffering crop or tree damage on the property. That property may be posted or un-posted. DMAP coupons are then given to the property owner or lessee at a rate of one per five acres of cultivated lands, or one per 50 acres of forest. Property owners are then allowed to distribute those coupons to licensed hunters, who can then redeem the coupon for a DMAP antlerless deer harvest permit. Hunters have to pay the Game Commission the set fee of \$10.70 for a resident DMAP permit.

The non-resident permit is \$35.70. Each permit can be used to harvest one antlerless deer on the specific DMAP property enrolled in the program. Permits to hunt under DMAP are only valid for the property for which they are issued. **To enroll** in DMAP you must contact the PA Game Commission regional office that serves your area immediately after deer seasons end. The PA Game Commission can also give you more information on the rules and regulations for DMAP.

Former Anti-GMO Activist Urges Farmers to Be Part of the Conversation

By Darrin Youker, deyouker@pfb.com

Mark Lynas took a lot of heat on social media when he changed his stance on the use of genetically modified organisms in today's agriculture. Lynas, who was a vocal anti-GMO advocate, announced his change of heart in a public speech in 2013 when he admitted that his stance on biotechnology was not based on scientific scrutiny. He's now grown into a staunch supporter of GMOs as a way to protect the environment and improve the lives of those living in the developing world. But changing the public stance on the use of GMOs will take the voices of farmers and others sharing their stories, said Lynas, an environmental activist who spoke at 97th American Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention and IDEAg Trade Show. Lynas now works for the Cornell Alliance of Science.

"People need a believable source of information, and it is not going to be a corporate public relations office," he said of changing consumer opinions on GMOs. "I think farmers themselves are believable and credible. Farmers have a real important voice and you can use social media to shed light on this issue."

Lynas believes that one way to change public opinion on GMO technology is by food labeling. In addition, Lynas said he would draw a high bar for what is considered GMO technology to show the public that these products have been used for the better part of two decades with no negative impact on public health.

"You can dispel fear by transparency. If you give people the feeling that they have a choice, they feel it is no longer scary," he said. "The only way to solve this is to get everything labeled. The more transparent you are, the more comfortable people will feel."

Farm Bureau supports voluntary labeling based on national standards set by the federal Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, similar to the national organic labeling standards. Farm Bureau wants to avoid a patchwork of state laws.

Lynas believes the environmental movement is fundamentally wrong on the issues of biotechnology in foods and is holding back the developing world. For instance, scientists have developed a strain of rice—called Golden Rice—that contains vitamin A, which is often deficient in the diets of Third World residents. However, environmentalists are trying to prevent the widespread adoption of Golden Rice because it was derived from GMO technology. “Even when a crop could save thousands of children’s lives it still gets attacked and destroyed because it contains GMO ingredients,” he said.

Lynas believes there is an ongoing public shift to better understand the role that GMOs play in feeding a growing plant. And while science can explain the safety of GMOs, farmers need to embrace their role as advocates for the technology and the steps they are taking to protect the Earth. ***To view a video about Lynas speaking at AFBF visit: www.pfb.com/video***

Farm Bureau Encourages Participation in Best Management Practices Survey

Penn State is conducting a survey aimed at counting the best management practices that Pennsylvania farmers have put in place on farms in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has partnered with Penn State and other state agencies in developing the survey and the process for handling of the data collected through the survey. Farmers will be asked to provide information on the types of BMPs used on their farm, such as cover crops or no-till planting.

“We need all farmers in the Bay watershed to take part in this survey and provide information on what they are doing to manage the soil and nutrients on their farm,” said PFB President Rick Ebert. “The data collected will be used to quantify for federal agencies a more accurate accounting of BMPs used by Pennsylvania farmers.”

Penn State is sending out letters encouraging farmers to participate in the survey and directing them to the website <http://src.survey.psu.edu/farmbmp/>. Each letter has a five-digit code that farmers must use to complete the survey. The survey is intended for farmers operating within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Farmers who have not completed the electronic survey by mid-February will receive a copy in the mail.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau believes the federal Environmental Protection Agency has significantly underreported the number of BMPs that farmers are using to reduce the amount of nutrients reaching the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Penn State will share the aggregated data with state and federal officials to give a more accurate accounting of BMPs within the watershed.

The model used by the EPA to develop its bay cleanup plan only accounts for BMPs that were paid for using federal cost-share dollars, ignoring the voluntary practices installed on farms. Participation in this survey is extremely valuable as PFB continues to challenge the accuracy of the EPA’s claims of levels of pollution caused by agriculture in the Bay. The project may require that someone from Penn State meet with a small number of randomly selected group of survey participants to verify that survey data reflects what is happening on the farm. PFB members are strongly encouraged to participate in this survey. *For more information, and to view a video of the survey, visit www.pfb.com/pfb-media/news-releases.*

Penn State Plans Regional Tree Fruit Meetings

Penn State Extension has planned nine regional educational meetings for commercial tree fruit producers. The meetings are opportunities to learn the latest research-based orchard management strategies from Extension specialists and to discuss preparations for the 2016 growing season.

Program highlights include:

- Flies, Scales and other Critters in Fruit
- Predicting Disease Infestation Periods
- Back to the Basics of Plant Nutrition
- Demystifying Copper for Disease Management
- 2016-17 Tree Fruit Production Guide Updates
- FSMA Compliance
- Spray Deposition
- Understanding the new WPS

Dates and locations:

Monday February 15 – Adams County

Biglerville High School; Contact: Tara Baugher, 717.334.6271

Tuesday, February 16 - Lancaster/York County

Lancaster; Contact Tim Elkner, 717.394.6851

Wednesday, February 17 - Franklin County

Waynesboro; Contact: Tara Baugher, 717.334.6271

Tuesday February 23 – Central Susquehanna

Mifflinburg; Contact John Esslinger, 570.784.6660

Wednesday February 24 – Southeast Region

Leesport; Contact Kathy Salisbury, 215.345.3283

Thursday February 25 – Northeast Region

Avoca; Contact John Esslinger, 570.784.6660

Tuesday, March 1 – Erie County

North East; Contact Andy Muza, 814.825.0900

Wednesday, March 2 – Western PA

Prospect; Contact Bob Pollock, 724.465.3880

Thursday, March 3 – Appalachian Fruit Growers

Bedford, PA; Contact Tom Ford, 814.472.7986

Pre-registration, pesticide license certification and fee information are available from the contact person in each region. If you are a regular participant at your local tree fruit meeting, expect an announcement to come in your mail. If you have not attended one of these programs in the past, you can e-mail the contact person to get on the meeting announcement mailing list. If you don't use e-mail call your local Extension office to get a phone number for the contact person for the meeting nearest you. *Source: Penn State*