

## **AG ISSUES UPDATE**

Edited by Brad Hollabaugh  
April, 2016

### **Budget Battle Over**

Pennsylvania's protracted, partisan and bitter budget battle is mostly over. Gov. Tom Wolf allowed House Bill 1801 to become law without his signature—meaning Pennsylvania finally has a spending plan in place nearly nine months after it was due. Pennsylvania has been operating since June 30 without an adopted spending plan, locking Harrisburg in an unprecedented stalemate over state spending and taxation.

House Bill 1801, passed in mid-March by the General Assembly, fully restores \$50 million in funding to Penn State Cooperative Extension, along with other priority agriculture items, schools and social service providers. Penn State officials were prepared to send out layoff notices on May 1 to more than 1,000 Extension educators if funding wasn't quickly restored.

While Gov. Wolf said he could not add his signature to House Bill 1801, he did allow it to become law. Under state law, Pennsylvania governors have 10 days to either sign or veto a bill, or it automatically becomes law. That is the method Gov. Wolf followed in this case. However, Gov. Wolf vetoed the fiscal code, a piece of legislation that accompanies the budget and focuses on taxation.

As a result, money for the state's Veterinary Lab System, Pennsylvania Fairs and the Farm Show cannot be transferred from the Racehorse Development Fund. Members of the House approved a bill to restore funding. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration at the time this newsletter was prepared. The budget does fund Extension, along with \$1.1 million for Agriculture Excellence programs, more than \$1.5 million for Agriculture Research conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, \$250,000 for Agriculture Exports, and \$177,000 each for the Dairy Show and Livestock Show.

While this ends a budget fight that has lasted since last summer, lawmakers and Gov. Wolf are still facing a June 30 deadline to address next year's budget, and issues like pension and property tax reform remain. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, as well as SHAP and many other Ag groups, will continue to advocate for priority agriculture issues.

### **PFB Leads the Push to #SavePSUAg**

When Penn State Extension faced its most serious funding crisis in its more than 100-year history, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau led efforts to push for legislative action. Both in the state capitol, and the court of public opinion, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau members spoke about the impact Penn State Extension has had on their families. Farmers, from across the state, rely on the expertise of Extension experts—regardless of their commodity.

Throughout the process, PFB explained the harm that would come to the agriculture industry if Extension closed. Extension saw its budget cut to zero as part of an ongoing budget battle in Harrisburg that stretched back to July.

At a press conference hosted by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau at Penn State's Fruit Research and Extension Center in Adams County, Bruce Hollabaugh, a local fruit grower, discussed the close relationship that exists between growers and Extension experts. Throughout the growing season, fruit growers are in daily contact with experts at the research center to help them understand the latest in pest detection and biological controls for diseases. The center also played a key role in researching invasive species like stink bugs. The loss of that kind of help would deliver a serious blow to the fruit industry, and one that can't easily be replaced by private industry, or another university, Hollabaugh said.

"If there are no more scientists, no more Extension agents, the impact will be immediate and devastating to our community," he said.

Hollabaugh praised the work of Extension researchers in their response to threats posed by stink bugs. The pests came into the region during the height of harvest, and growers did not have the time or resources to examine how to combat the invasive species.

"It really threatened the very viability of what we do," Hollabaugh said. "Without Penn State Research, and Extension to disseminate the information, it could have resulted in losses that far exceeded the losses we had."

During the same press conference, PFB President Rick Ebert, said he has worked with Extension since he first started farming, and has relied on their expertise for soil testing and nutrient recommendations. Recently, he turned to Extension for help with transition planning as he brings the next generation into the family business.

"It set our family at ease and turned an awkward conversation about roles, responsibilities and finances into a productive discussion," he said.

PFB Vice President Chris Hoffman testified at a joint hearing of the Senate and House Agriculture & Rural Affairs committees about how much farmers count on Extension and veterinary labs as a first line of defense for diseases. Hoffman, who owns a hog and chicken farm in Juniata County, praised the work between Extension and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture on establishing protocols for the monitoring of highly-pathogenic avian influenza.

"These are the things as farmers that we can't do alone," he said. "We need Extension and Research to help us through this."

### **USApple Continues to Work on H-2A Issues**

H-2A delays have already begun and apple growers who rely on the program for pruning and other springtime work are feeling the impact. USApple is working with growers and key congressional offices to expedite the process. However, with problems reported not only at the Department of Labor but also the Department of State and Department of

Homeland Security, there are significant concerns about what will happen when the program reaches its peak in the summer.

USApple and our coalition partners in the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE), which Dianne Kurrle serves on the Executive Committee, and the Agriculture Workforce Coalition (AWC) are meeting with key congressional committees as well as the Department of Labor in an effort to ensure that workers arrive on time for the harvest. Please contact us if you experience delays, or other problems with the H-2A program, because it is important to have very specific examples when we are meeting with congressional offices. We can share the information without revealing the producers name or company. Staff Contact: Diane Kurrle. *Apple Bites - 4.6.16, USApple.*

### **Senators Fail To Adopt GMO Labeling Bill**

The U.S. Senate failed to pass a biotechnology bill that would have established national standards for food derived from genetic modified organisms. In a procedural move, the Senate failed 48-49 to end debate on the bill and move it forward for a final vote. Both sides are continuing negotiations on the measure, but debate on the issue centers on whether it will call for voluntary, or mandatory, labeling. Sen. Pat Toomey voted in support of the bill while Sen. Bob Casey voted against the bill.

Senate Agriculture Chairman Pat Roberts, a Kansas Republican, introduced a bill that would have prevented a patchwork of state laws, and as a result save consumers money. Without a federal standard for labeling products containing ingredients derived from GMOs, state laws like one in Vermont—set to take effect in July—will lead to a patchwork of state laws. A recent study suggests that mandatory labeling would cost the average family an additional \$1,100 a year in increased food costs.

### **Have You Taken the BMP Survey?**

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is encouraging farmers in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to take part in a survey aimed at measuring the use of best management practices by the April 30 deadline. 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 has sent 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 yet completed the electronic survey should have received a copy in the mail. Farmers can visit

the survey website to request a copy. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau believes it is critical for every farmer in the watershed to participate. Our organization contends 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.

The project may require that someone from Penn State meet with a small number of randomly selected survey participants to verify that survey data reflects what is happening on the farm. For more information, and to view a video about the survey visit [www.pfb.com/pennstatesurvey](http://www.pfb.com/pennstatesurvey).

### **Legislation Introduced to Increase Hunting Licenses**

A bipartisan group of Senators introduced legislation to increase the state's hunting license. If approved, it would be the first increase of hunting licenses in Pennsylvania in 17 years.

All hunting fee increases must receive legislative approval. Under the bill, a general hunting or furtaker license would increase to \$29 from \$19. Resident junior and senior license fees would stay the same. The bill also calls for increases for special hunting privileges, such as waterfowl, archery and bear.

In addition, the bill calls for the creation of a combination license, called the Ultimate Outdoorsman, which would give a wide variety of hunting options for a \$110 fee. The Game Commission does not receive state tax dollars for operations and instead relies on hunting and trapping fees. About 35 percent of Game Commission revenue comes from hunting and furtaker license sales, along with excise tax on guns and ammunition and the sale of natural resources. Farm Bureau policy supports a \$5 increase in general hunting licenses.

### **Bill Would Exempt High Tunnels from Storm Water Planning**

Farmers who want to use high tunnels for their agriculture businesses would be exempt from requirements under the Storm Water Management Act, under a bill approved by state House lawmakers. House Bill 1103, introduced by Rep. David Zimmerman, would exempt high tunnels from planning and regulatory requirements under the act.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection issued regulations that require some Pennsylvania municipalities to require high tunnels be subject to storm water planning and engineering rules. High tunnels are often used as temporary growing structures and, depending on the crop, are moved from field to field. Some municipalities have required berms or filter beds to manage storm water runoff around high tunnels, Zimmerman said. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

## **General Assembly Approves Industrial Hemp Bill**

The Pennsylvania General Assembly adopted a bill that would allow for a pilot program for the growing of industrial hemp. Senate Bill 50, introduced by Sen. Judy Schwank, would provide for limited growing of hemp, under the supervision of state government and a research university. The bill now heads to Gov. Tom Wolf for consideration.

Hemp was once grown as a cash crop in Pennsylvania before production was outlawed by the federal government. A provision in the 2014 Farm Bill allowed for states to establish limited pilot programs supervised by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

“The goal is to research best practices and clear the way for Pennsylvania to become a hemp-farming powerhouse,” Schwank said. “I am not expecting hemp to be used commercially for many years, but this pilot program gets Pennsylvania’s foot in the door, and opens the possibilities for future generations of farmers.”

## **The 2016 Spring Orchard Meetings Are Scheduled**

Penn State Extension has planned ten educational meetings for commercial tree fruit growers this spring, beginning April 14. These meetings are being held in orchards across the state. Growers have an opportunity to visit other commercial tree fruit operations, learn from Extension specialists who are experts in their program areas, and discuss current tree fruit issues with other growers at a critical time of the growing season.

The program highlights include:

- Gearing Up to Manage Tree Fruit Diseases
- Bio-renovation of Orchard Sites
- Integrated Weed Management
- Monitoring and Management for Insect and Mite Pests
- Apple Thinning and Promoting Return Bloom

Meeting dates, times and locations are listed below. For more information, contact the county Extension office where the meeting is being held.

April 14, 6:00- 7:30 p.m., Penn State Fruit Research and Extension Center, 290 University Drive, Biglerville

May 3, 6:30- 8:30 p.m. Kauffman's Fruit Farm & Market, 3097 Old Philadelphia Pike, Bird in Hand

May 4, 6:00- 8:00 p.m. Andrews Orchard, 760 Appleway, Saint Thomas

May 5, 6:00- 8:00 p.m. Twin Springs Fruit Farm, 257 High Street, Orrtanna

May 10, 12:00- 2:00 p.m. Burch Farms Country Market, 9210 Sidehill Road North East

May 11, 6:30- 9:00 p.m. Apple Castle, 277 State Route 18, New Wilmington

May 17, 6:15-8:30 p.m. Hinish Orchards, 217 Apple Tree Lane Roaring Spring

May 18, 6:00- 8:00 p.m. Grim's Orchard, 9941 Schantz Road, Breinigsville

May 24, 6:00- 9:00 p.m. O'Hara's Orchard, 73 Orchard Drive, Bloomsburg

June 7, 6:00- 8:00 p.m. Orr's Orchard and Farm Market, 682 Orr Drive., Martinsburg, WV

*Source: Penn State*

### **Cold Temperatures Raise Concerns in Apple Country**

Recent cold temperatures and even snow in some of the Eastern apple growing areas have caused concerns about the impact of the cold and even sub-freezing temperatures on apple trees.

Researchers at Washington State University studied the impact of various temperatures on apples, pears and plums at varying stages of development. For apples they looked at silver tip to full bloom and found that conditions prior to a freeze event, such as a prolonged cool period, or warm period can affect the ability of the bud to tolerate cold temperatures. The University of Utah has taken the results of the Washington State research and published a chart that indicates the critical temperatures below freezing which damage can occur to apples at various stages of development. *Apple Bites - 4.6.16, USApple.*