

**Secretary Dennis C Wolff's Testimony
Before the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
Hearing on the "Farmers First Agenda"**

October 17, 2005

Room 8EA East Wing

The Honorable Chairmen Waugh and O'Pake, distinguished members of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and guests, my name is Dennis C Wolff and I am a dairy farmer as well as the Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture. On behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the Rendell Administration, I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and thank this committee for your efforts through the "Farmers First Agenda". Today I will provide comments on alternative uses for manure and on expanding the Farms to School initiative which proved very successful in its pilot phase in Philadelphia through the Food Trust.

I would like to begin by spending a few minutes talking about Governor Rendell and Pennsylvania agriculture's commitment to doing our part to protect our natural resources. By further reducing nutrients and sediments that flow into our local streams, the Pennsylvania agricultural community has shown their commitment to water quality and improving the quality of life of all Pennsylvania residents. Pennsylvania agriculture has been a leader in adopting and implementing award-winning programs to improve water quality and reduce nutrient runoff. They have done it by developing productive and hands-on working relationships with government and groups that have offered to help farmers implement solutions to problems on their farm.

One of the issues frequently discussed is the impact farm practices have on the environment. To address this concern, the Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the State Conservation Commission works relentlessly to implement our internationally recognized Nutrient Management Program. In fact, in 2005 Pennsylvania was recognized in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* for utilizing the 'right approach' in revising its program regulations to adjust to new scientific findings relating to nutrient management. Pennsylvania was a national leader in enacting nutrient

management laws for farms, and one of the first in implementing phosphorous indexing for manure applications as well as manure hauler certification.

Our continuous efforts toward progressive and science-based manure management and improved water quality have been exemplary and we are fortunate to have the agricultural community as strong supporters of our environmental program. Not only do high density animal operations cooperate with our staff to develop nutrient management plans suited for their farms, but farms of all sizes continue to voluntarily expand their own environmentally sound farming practices. In order to protect water quality and better understand the relationship farmers have with our environment, over 2,100 farms have developed nutrient management plans and over 460 farmers have voluntarily taken the “livestock environmental literacy course.” The Governor has also provided millions of dollars to help farmers develop and implement nutrient management plans on their farms. Pennsylvania has a non-point source strategy approved by EPA, and is one of the first states to have an EPA-approved permit program for larger farm operations.

One of the next frontiers in nutrient management for Pennsylvania will be developing programs and projects to assist farmers with managing excess nutrients on their farm. Just as Pennsylvania agriculture successfully tackled the management of nitrogen through the nutrient management program, I feel we will meet similar success with our impending efforts to manage phosphorous in an environmentally friendly way.

New regulatory requirements on agriculture, including the phosphorous index and the Chesapeake Tributary Strategy, will require many farmers to find alternative sites for land application of the manure, or alternative uses for that manure. The Governor recognizes this need and is prepared to provide leadership and support to help the farm community meet these new regulatory requirements. We have already taken steps to begin this process by contributing two additional State Conservation Commission staff members who will work with the agricultural community to identify and develop technologies, programs and collaborative partnerships which will assist farmers in finding beneficial alternative uses for manure generated on their farm. Likewise, it is my intention to pull together a group of industry and academic individuals, who, under the

leadership of the State Conservation Commission, will carry on and see through to completion past efforts on identifying and implementing projects related to alternative uses of manure. Finally, the Department is prepared to act as a facilitator in pulling together human and financial resources to help us accomplish these goals.

Pennsylvania is proud to be a national leader in conservation stewardship. Our internationally-recognized nutrient management programs combined with our leadership in odor management, phosphorus indexing, manure hauling certification, and other efforts makes Pennsylvania an environmentally responsible agricultural powerhouse.

I would like to congratulate The Food Trust for its exciting and successful Kindergarten Initiative, their newest school program, that has been successful at changing the way children, their parents and their communities eat and think about food. The program combines local food, classroom instruction, and parent involvement to make a strong impact on the attitudes and behaviors of children towards their food. The goal of the program is to get kids excited about eating healthy foods, while deepening their understanding of where food comes from. As part of this program, The Food Trust brings healthy, delicious snacks, grown on Pennsylvania farms, into the kindergarten classrooms of four Philadelphia schools. Teachers are provided with a curriculum alignment plan and resources for incorporating nutrition and agriculture education into their daily lessons.

Senator Waugh and Senator Wenger's Farm to Schools Initiative is an exciting and bold step at expanding the success of such initiatives occurring in Philadelphia right now to other counties throughout Pennsylvania. I believe this initiative would complement existing efforts underway, efforts which are aimed to help children and their parents become aware of where their food comes from, choose healthy and nutritious foods, and support local Pennsylvania agriculture. I think it is very important to recognize that we need to find ways to meet the goals of this initiative without putting additional burdens or pressure on the Commonwealth's General Fund Budget.

To help address the need for increased awareness of the important role agriculture plays in our society and economy the Governor launched an agriculture education

initiative. The initiative has several key components, the most important of which is the Marketplace for the Mind.com website. This on-line agricultural education resource was created under the direction of Governor Rendell, in cooperation with the Department of Education. Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation with a website of this type. The primary goal of the site is to provide teachers in Pennsylvania with convenient access to approved, quality, agricultural education materials aligned to current Pennsylvania teaching standards for use in their classrooms. The secondary goal of the site is to provide students, the general public, the agricultural community and government officials with up-to-date agricultural educational resources, event listings and useful information to enhance their understanding and appreciation of Pennsylvania agriculture.

A new program developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to ensure that consumers have access to high food safety and product quality standards, PA Preferred, is designed to significantly increase consumer awareness of Pennsylvania products and communicate the importance of buying products made here at home. Consumers will feel good about their commitment to Pennsylvania and its producers through their purchase of products made in the Commonwealth. Research shows that 93 percent of Pennsylvania consumers prefer to buy products made and grown in their own state. Pennsylvania is home to about 60,000 farms, 3,400 food processors, more than 1,200 floriculture and nursery crop producers, countless restaurants and retailers, and 12 million consumers. Through education and promotion, consumers will learn to look for the PA Preferred logo and purchase products that display it. Program members include Pennsylvania producers, processors, associations, and retailers and represent produce, processed foods, nursery products, hardwoods, Christmas trees, farmers markets, aquaculture, livestock, associations, merchants, restaurants, grocery stores, and many other items and services.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires all Local Education Agencies (LEA's) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to develop local wellness policies. One requirement of the law is that nutrition guidelines must be developed for all foods available on each school campus during the school day with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity. The standards apply to all grades in all buildings. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has developed dietary guidelines that, used in total, will assist LEA's in meeting the

objectives for this section of the law. Implementing the nutrient standards, in part or in whole, is voluntary. The standards are for competitive foods and do not include foods provided through the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs because these meals are required to comply with federal nutrition standards under the School Meals Initiative. Competitive foods are foods offered at school, other than meals served through the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs.

I look forward to the opportunity to work with your Committee on the Farms To School Initiative and commend you for taking a hard look at nutrition in schools and linking local farmers up with schools to provide wholesome and delicious food products.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of this proposal and look forward to working with you to continue our successful efforts at preserving and protecting the Pennsylvania farmer. Thank you again for taking time to listen to and consider my views and testimony this morning.