



# Plans for Pennsylvania

**HON. DENNIS C. WOLFF**  
**Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture**

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Agricultural education and economic development are two priorities that play an important and integral role in the agriculture industry. Last month, I discussed agricultural education in my column and this month, I would like to devote my attention to agriculture's role in Pennsylvania's economic health and what the department is doing to develop the economic potential of agriculture in the commonwealth.

Agriculture is clearly a driving force in the state's economy, with every dollar earned by a farmer generating more than \$10 in economic activity, from sales to processing, distribution, and retailing. Yet, we all know that there

are serious concerns about the condition of Pennsylvania's economy.

Gov. Rendell is committed to a strong agricultural sector as part of his overall rural economic development strategy and I am confident that we can secure a strong future for agriculture in Pennsylvania. Within the Governor's stimulus package, \$100 million is earmarked for agriculture and tourism, the state's leading industries. I am working closely with Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Yablonsky to ensure that this funding is used in ways that could best strengthen agriculture and our rural communities. It is critically important to all of us that the Governor's Plan for a New Penn-

sylvania be enacted by the General Assembly as quickly as possible.

Earlier this year, the General Assembly opened up the Small Business First Loan Program and the Machinery and Equipment Loan Program (MELF) for agriculture entities. This week, Secretary Yablonsky and I stood together on Gro-Lan Farms in Franklin County enjoying the new freestall barn the Grove brothers are building with funding from the Small Business First Program and AgChoice Farm Credit.

In recent months, I have created a Dairy Task Force and a Livestock Protection Program to ensure that Pennsylvania remains one of the nation's leading dairy states. And I have been working on many other initiatives and programs designed to let Pennsylvania agriculture take advantage of all available economic opportunities and maintain its position in the state economy.

Last month, Pennsylvania was selected to receive about \$1 million by USDA to create the Key-

stone Agricultural Innovation Center, a joint project of the Department of Agriculture and Penn State's Cooperative Extension Service. Congressman Tim Holden and Associate Dean Ted Alter joined USDA State Director Byron Ross and me to acknowledge the selection of our proposal. This was particularly noteworthy considering that Pennsylvania was one of only 10 states selected for an agricultural innovation center.

USDA created the program as part of the 2002 Farm Bill to foster farmer ownership of products and processes beyond the farm gate. Once formed, the Keystone Agricultural Innovation Center will provide a network of technical assistance and educational opportunities for agricultural producers.

The education programs will focus on improving the ability of agricultural producers to evaluate and choose value-added agricultural commodities or products. The technical assistance aspect will focus on processing and other physical properties of agricultural commodities and

products, on marketing and business management issues, and on local agricultural business climate issues that create value-added opportunities.

The Keystone Agricultural Innovation Center will rely on the expertise of Penn State's Cooperative Extension Service and other project partners to offer farmers and farm groups technical assistance in analyzing the feasibility of projects and developing business and marketing plans for new crops, new markets, and value-added products. If farmers can develop products that allow them to earn a larger share of consumer food and energy dollars, the entire rural economy wins because farmers tend to spend their money locally.

The Ag Innovation Center is a step in the right direction for Pennsylvania agriculture—particularly for the value-added sector of our agricultural economy. Together with other programs we are working on, I am certain that we will be able to continue increase the agricultural opportunities for Pennsylvania agriculturists.

## Farm Bureau Asks Milk Marketing Board For Continuation Of Milk Price

CAMP HILL (Cumberland Co.) — Pointing to rising costs on dairy farms and declining milk production in Pennsylvania, PFB today urged the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB) to maintain an over-order premium of at least \$1.65 per hundredweight of milk for the first half of 2004.

Farm Bureau Dairy Specialist Joel Rotz testified on behalf of PFB during a PMMB hearing in Harrisburg today. The current over-order premium of \$1.65/cwt. will end on Dec. 31. The PMMB over-order premium is mandated to be paid to dairy farmers on milk produced, processed and sold as Class I fluid milk within Pennsylvania's borders.

"Pennsylvania producers continue to receive milk prices well below the average producers cost of production," said Rotz.

"As a result, milk production in the state continues to fall behind year-

ago levels, which threatens the long-term viability of the industry.

"Milk prices are projected to remain at low levels in early 2004. Costs for Pennsylvania dairy farmers will continue to rise due to the increasing need for supplemental feed purchases such as soybean meal because of low quality forages being harvested as a result of wet conditions throughout the season. In addition to their being a need to purchase these supplemental feeds, they are 33 percent above what they cost last year."

"When producer milk prices fall far short of producer needs, as they do currently, and have for some time, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has always supported the highest level of premium the market can bear."

PFB urged the Board to support at least a \$1.65 per hundredweight premium across the state. "If those that market milk in the state believe marketing conditions will support an even higher level of premium, Penn-

sylvania Farm Bureau supports those higher levels based upon the great need our producers face," Rotz stated.

Farm Bureau presented information indicating the average price paid to Pennsylvania dairymen during January-June, 2004 will be about \$13.74/cwt. If dairy producers price needs for management, interest on equity and a reasonable profit were taken into account, the average dairy farmer would actually experience a loss of \$2.80 on every hundredweight of milk produced. Rotz told the Board.

"Pennsylvania's milk production continues to falter. This disturbing trend has persisted for too long and appears to be increasing," Rotz testified. "This trend threatens not only the infrastructure of Pennsylvania's dairy industry, but also the entire agriculture infrastructure in the state, since dairy has historically been the backbone of Pennsylvania's agricultural industry."

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