

Key Takeaways

- Broadband remains a key infrastructure need for farmers, particularly to enable farmers to take advantage of new and upcoming technologies.
- Filling the labor needs of farms will require a combination of support for migrant farmers and increased encouragement of youth to consider agricultural careers.
- Agriculture-related career opportunities, such as veterinarians, engineers, and robotics technicians, are plentiful and Pennsylvania needs to promote these opportunities to grow and maintain this important industry.

The 2021 Rural Policy Summit is a virtual series that brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, nonprofit leaders, academic researchers, industry professionals, and others interested in rural, to learn about and discuss major policy issues that will affect rural Pennsylvania over the next 5 to 10 years.

The five topic areas for the series are education, health care, local services, economic development, and agriculture.

This session, which was held January 14 and highlighted here, focused on Pennsylvania's agriculture industry and policies that can help support farmers and agricultural producers and processors.

The series is being cohosted by the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health, Pennsylvania Rural Development Council, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Pennsylvania Downtown Center, and Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank's Community Development and Regional Outreach Department.

Scan QR code for the speakers list, presentation, and session recording.



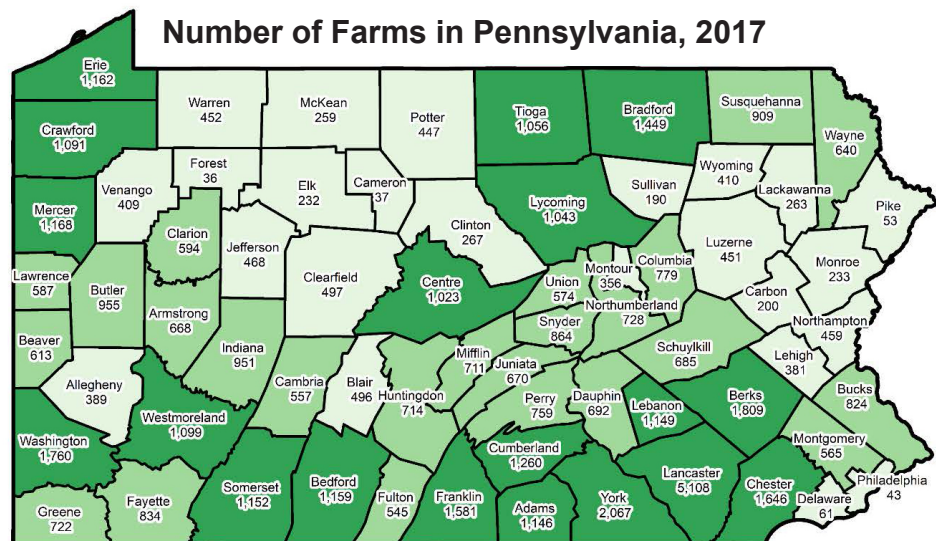
Background on Agriculture

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Pennsylvania contained 53,157 farms with more than 7.28 million acres of farmland. That acreage has fallen consistently from 7.87 million from 1987. Most of these farms are in counties near the commonwealth's southern border, but there are significant numbers of farms in northwest and north central Pennsylvania.

Dairy and poultry are the largest farm commodities in the commonwealth, with combined sales of more than \$3.5 billion in 2017.

Farming in Pennsylvania remains a relatively homogenous profession: men own 79 percent of the farms in the commonwealth, and only 1 percent of farmers are people of color. Pennsylvania has some of the most expensive farm acreage in the country.

Conservation easements protect 8.1 percent of farmland in Pennsylvania, with higher percentages of farmland in easements in the state's southeastern counties.



Statewide Total, 2017 = 53,157

Legend: <500 Farms (light green), 500 to 999 Farms (medium green), 1,000+ Farms (dark green)

Data source: 2017 Census of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Discussion Highlights

Panelists discussed a variety of policy issues facing the agricultural industry in the commonwealth. Early on, panelists agreed there were three fundamental concerns in agriculture policy: land cost, labor shortages, and environmental policy.

Land for farmland in Pennsylvania costs more than \$6,800 an acre. Senator Elder Vogel, majority chair of the Pennsylvania Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, mentioned some farmland may be selling for as much as \$10,000 an acre. Senator Vogel discussed his recommendation for a new farmer's tax credit to help young farmers acquire land. Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding discussed the importance of economic development in farming communities to ensure that, regardless of land costs, farmers see a pathway to prosperity in their business.

Representatives Dan Moul, majority chair, and Eddie Day Pashinski, Democratic chair, of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, both spoke on the importance of improving agricultural education. Representative Moul talked about the need for a combination of good migrant worker support and improved training opportunities for young people to learn that they can make a living in the agricultural industry. Representative Pashinski spoke of the benefits of various agricultural apprenticeship programs across the state and discussed the value of expanding and supporting similar programs to provide training for future farmers and farm workers.

Panelists also agreed that environmental policy was going to be a key consideration for the future of agriculture. Senator Judy Schwank, Democratic chair of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, noted that it will be essential for food production to be part of the solution to climate change, while also feeding the planet for years to come. Some technologies, like the development of alternative energy on agricultural land and more sustainable farming practices, have already begun to take place. Several members of the panel noted the importance of efficient environmental regulations that do not hamper farmers' ability to transition to more sustainable production.

The panelists agreed that broadband is essential to the future of agriculture as a means of improving production through technological advancements. Several panelists discussed the future use of augmented reality technology as a means of increasing information flow and supporting animal health, and automated field equipment, both technologies that rely on stable internet that is not available in many rural regions. These technological advancements will mean that there will be many more opportunities for engineers, technicians, and roboticists in the agriculture industry in addition to veterinarians. The panelists agreed that Pennsylvania should make clear to young professionals that these skilled positions exist in rural communities, not just in urban areas.

Secretary Redding noted that Pennsylvania has one of the nation's highest rates of farmers under age 35. He said this is a sign that there are young people across Pennsylvania who see farming and agriculture production as a promising future. Panelists were resolute in their support of the future of agriculture in the commonwealth. While there are meaningful challenges ahead, the panelists agreed that there are significant opportunities for the future of farming.

Thank you to our panelists and moderators: Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding; Senator Elder Vogel, Chair, Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee; Senator Judy Schwank, Democratic Chair, Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee; Representative Dan Moul, Chair, House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and Center Board Member; Representative Eddie Day Pashinski, Democratic Chair, House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and Center Board Vice Chairman; Dr. Timothy Kelsey, Professor of Agricultural Economics at The Pennsylvania State University and Center Board Member, and Mark Critz, Western Regional Director and Executive Director of the Rural Development Council, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

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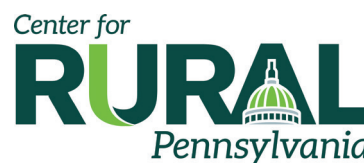
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625 Forster St., Harrisburg, PA 17120
(717) 787-9555 • www.rural.pa.gov