



Joint Informational Meeting

House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
&
Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

*The State of the Livestock Industry in
Pennsylvania: Producer Perspectives*

Red Barn Annex

Ag Progress Days, Pennsylvania Furnace, PA

Wednesday, August 14, 2025

10:00 a.m.



Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, Chair
Rep. Dan Moul, Republican Chair

Sen. Elder Vogel, Chair
Sen. Judith Schwank, Democratic Chair

House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

10:00 a.m. Opening Remarks by Committee Chairs
 Member Introductions

10:10 a.m. “The State of the Livestock Industry in Pennsylvania: Producer Perspectives”

Speakers list subject to change

- U.S. Congressman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
- Glenn Gorrell, President,
PA Dairymen’s Association, Bradford County (Dairy)
- Darwin Nissley, President,
Pennsylvania Cattlemen’s Association, Lancaster County (Beef)
- Coleman Wagner, President,
PA Pork Producer’s Council, Lancaster County (Pork)
- Chris Pierce, President,
Heritage Poultry Management Services, Inc, Lebanon County (Eggs)
- Tessa Applegate, Chief Financial Officer
Clarks Feed Mill, Inc., Northumberland County (Broilers)
- Dan Turner, President
PA Sheep and Wool Growers Association, Cumberland County (Sheep)

11:10 a.m. Questions

11:30 a.m. Adjourn

Joint Public Hearing
“The State of the Livestock Industry in Pennsylvania: Producer Perspectives”

8/13/25

Discussion Points (8 minutes verbal presentation):

- Condition Pennsylvania Egg Industry
 - Growth opportunities & challenges
- High Path Avian Influenza experiences & future
 - Impacts and preparedness
 - Supporting bodies (PennAg, PDA, PSU Extension, PADLS Labs)
- Outlook for egg farming in Pennsylvania

Chris Pierce - President

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Joint Public Hearing
**“The State of the Livestock Industry in Pennsylvania: Producer
Perspectives”**

8/13/25

Testimony from:

Chris Pierce

President/Heritage Poultry Management Services

Annville, Pennsylvania

Topic: Egg Farming

Bio:

As President of Heritage Poultry Management Services, Inc. in Annville, PA, Chris Pierce is pleased to work with local, state, and national organizations to support the rural way of life so important to many. Chris is committed to ensuring that the egg industry provides for the care and well-being of the egg laying hens in their care and meeting consumer expectations for responsible hen care..Heritage Poultry Management Services provides management services for both traditional and non-cage egg production with a full understanding of the benefits and challenges for both approaches. Heritage partners with farms of all sizes, to support their overall success of producing the highest quality eggs. Heritage PMS is supported by a qualified team of PhD Poultry Nutritionists, Certified Poultry Service Technicians and a strong office support team, to ensure the highest levels of feed safety, animal welfare, production, and overall hen health. Heritage PMS, Inc has a wealth of knowledge and experience, supporting the commercial egg industry for over 45 years. Today Heritage provides flock management services for approximately 7 million hens and pullets. Chris and his wife, Pamela live in Annville, Pennsylvania and are active members of their church and community. Chris has served as Chairman of American Egg board, and on numerous boards and committees for local, state, and national egg producer organizations.

Written Testimony of Coleman Wagner

President, Pennsylvania Pork Producers Council

General Manager, Ag Ventures Swine Management Services

August 8, 2025

Subject: Challenges Facing Pennsylvania's Pork Industry

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the current challenges facing Pennsylvania's pork producers. My name is Coleman Wagner, President of the Pennsylvania Pork Producers Council. My family and I are from Lancaster County and operate Ag Ventures, our swine production company that produces over 300,000 pigs per year working alongside many local farming families. Our family has been raising pigs for three generations, and we're proud to be part of an industry that plays such a vital role in Pennsylvania's economy and food supply chain.

1. Economic Pressures Relating to Facility Costs and Contract Terms

The predominant method of raising hogs in Pennsylvania is through contract finishing. The contract finishing arrangement has been a sound business model for the past thirty years and has been a valuable tool in supporting the next generation coming onto the farm. However, while contract amounts have stayed relatively stagnant, new barn build costs have more than doubled since the mid 90's and early 2000's. While the early confinement facilities built 25-30 years ago are nearing the end of their useful life and phasing out, current construction costs are making remodeling existing facilities or building new facilities not viable options. The industry is facing an infrastructure shortage in relation to finishing facilities. We support the creation of state cost-share or low-interest facility loans to help bridge the gap between past and current capital requirements and to give the next generation a viable path forward in pig farming.

3. Regulatory Burdens and Interstate Market Disruptions

Pennsylvania producers are facing increasing uncertainty due to regulations imposed outside our borders. State-specific mandates affect interstate commerce and put Pennsylvania producers in a difficult position. We support animal welfare and continuous improvement. However, the lack of uniform national standards creates confusion and economic risk for family farms. We encourage state leaders to pursue consistent, science-based policies.

4. Animal Disease Prevention and Biosecurity

The threat of foreign animal diseases like African Swine Fever (ASF) is ever present—an outbreak in Pennsylvania would be devastating. However, numerous other diseases are always circulating such as PRRS which may be more subtle than ASF but can be equally as impactful. Pennsylvania's location outside of the corn belt robs us of feeding hogs as competitively as the Midwest states but our lower hog densities present our sole competitive advantage of high health status and livability. We appreciate the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's efforts to improve surveillance and farm-level biosecurity, but more can be done. We ask for increased funding for disease preparedness, emergency response plans, and continued investment and flexibility in programs such as the Ag Innovation Fund which could be used to build wash/bake bays, etc. to protect our sole competitive advantage at all costs.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania's pork industry contributes significantly to the state's agricultural output. Despite the challenges facing us, we are committed to working together as producers and growers to provide the world with safe, nutritious and affordable pork. With targeted policy support, investment in infrastructure, and fair regulatory treatment, we believe Pennsylvania pork producers can look forward to a bright future for years to come.

Sincerely,

Coleman Wagner
President, Pennsylvania Pork Producers Council
General Manager, Ag Ventures Swine Management Services
Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
Email: coleman@agventuresllc.net
Cell: 717-682-3183

The Dynamic & Diverse Pennsylvania Sheep Industry

Pennsylvania has a rich agricultural heritage, of which sheep farming has historically played a significant role. Back in the day, over a million sheep grazed throughout the Commonwealth, with Merino sheep, highly valued for their fine wool were central to the early industry. The consumption of lamb in the US declined dramatically after World War II due to the GIs being fed low-quality, canned mutton while liberating Europe. They swore off eating mutton and related it to negative, wartime experiences.

Though the ultimate sheep product was a nutritious protein source of lamb or mutton, the other primary focus of the sheep industry was wool production. After World War II, the value of wool declined due to synthetics, so the sheep industry suffered even more. Though the sheep industry has had a hard time recovering from these setbacks, today it is moving to a more diversified approach, encompassing meat, milk, and innovative ecological services.

This may sound like all doom and gloom, but au contraire, as today the Pennsylvania sheep industry is a dynamic sector, contributing value across various fronts. Sheep continue to provide traditional products such as fiber, meat, milk and cheese; though are now recognized for their value in land management with environmental benefits. This expanded role highlights a significant evolution in the economic and ecological valuation of sheep within Pennsylvania and may create the largest increase in sheep numbers over the last century.

As of January 1, 2025, the total inventory of sheep, including lambs, in Pennsylvania stands at 98,000 head, and has hovered at roughly 100,000 over the last 6 years. There are approximately 3,600 sheep producers throughout the state, making Pennsylvania 5th in the nation. Pennsylvania's sheep sector is largely composed of numerous smaller, often family-owned, flocks rather than a few large-scale enterprises. These smaller flocks represent supplemental income to a large number of farmers, as well as localized markets serving many diverse communities.

It is difficult to fully understand the impact that the sheep industry has on Pennsylvania, and I will argue that whatever you think it is, you need to think much larger. USDA and custom slaughter facilities give a glimpse of the lamb and sheep crop, and according to USDA statistics, Pennsylvania lamb slaughter increased from 88,000 in 2019 to 134,000 in 2023, for an increase of 35% in 4 years! New Holland Sheep sales average approximately 2,000 sheep/week, though many are shipped across state lines. Other PA sale barns and on-farm sales are likely to add another 1,000 sheep/week to the total lambs processed in the state. According to the American Sheep Industry and the American Lamb Board, there are so many facilities and farms processing sheep for the non-traditional, light lamb, ethnic markets, that Pennsylvania is considered part of the Wild, Wild East when it comes to tracking official numbers. The ethnic market represents a substantial and expanding segment within Pennsylvania, often preferring on-farm sales. The non-traditional markets help protect Pennsylvania shepherds from the pressure of imported lamb, as 70% of the traditional lamb consumed in the US is imported. This data shows that meat sales are driving an increase in sheep production.

But wait, there's more! I mentioned earlier that sheep are being used in land management practices for their environmental benefits. This is often referred to as targeted grazing, which represents an innovative use of sheep to control vegetation.

Sheep are utilized to manage grasses, forbs, residues, and shrubs across diverse landscapes including pastures, crop fields, forests, and solar fields. This creates new revenue streams for farmers, who can be compensated for providing these environmental services. Solar grazing has been a major driver in expanding the sheep numbers in Pennsylvania. This practice is referred to as **agrivoltaics**, combining sheep grazing with solar energy generation on the same land. Sheep are particularly well-suited for this role due to their size and grazing habits, which enable them to effectively manage vegetation under and around solar panels without causing damage. This dual-use strategy transforms a potential land-use conflict between energy and agriculture into a mutually beneficial relationship, maximizing productivity from the same land area. Shepherds who might have had a flock of 50 sheep have expanded their flocks into the thousands, as they win contracts to manage vegetation at large solar sites. Other shepherds benefit by raising seedstock and rams to service these large flocks. This also provides lamb meat into the regional markets, making lamb a more common protein.

Another growth area for sheep is through dairy operations. Sheep milk and cheese are much higher in protein and calcium than cow and goat milk and are linked to boosting brain health. As more people strive for a healthier lifestyle, the demand for sheep dairy products will increase.

And though sheep are famous for their wool, a new age has dawned where hair sheep are now prevalent across Pennsylvania, removing the need to find shearers, and allowing older farmers to continue raising sheep in a less labor-intensive style. Other than just farmers getting older, there are other challenges that the sheep industry faces. Some of these are the lack of access to small ruminant veterinarians, the cost of processing lambs at USDA slaughter facilities, little to no research on sheep medications and vaccinations, lack of shearers and a weak wool market.

Penn State, other universities, and the PA Sheep and Wool Growers Association, are providing greatly needed resources and guidance for shepherds, encouraging farmers to strive for new solutions. We encourage continuous improvement through education on nutrition, best practices, marketing, shearing, handling equipment, cooking, genetics, disease prevention and much more. Besides these many field days and classroom sessions, the PA Ram Test Sale helps deliver improved genetics to Pennsylvania flocks, and PSWGA will be hosting the inaugural PA Sheep and Wool Festival October 11 & 12 at Dayton, PA, with a sheep show, fiber demonstrations, sheep herding, sheep & fiber educational sessions, as well as lamb sampling and sheep snuggling. Something for everyone!

In conclusion, the Pennsylvania sheep industry shows strength in its capacity for diversification and innovation, moving beyond traditional meat and wool production to embrace high-value niche markets. This includes the growing ethnic lamb sector, the burgeoning sheep milk and cheese market, and pioneering land management services such as targeted and solar grazing. It is well possible that the sheep industry will continue on this record pace of growth and once again become a familiar contributor to Pennsylvania agriculture.

“The State of the Livestock Industry: Producer Perspective”

Good morning honorable members of the Senate and House Agriculture and Rural Affairs committee. I am Darwin Nissley, cattle producer and President of the PA Cattlemen’s Association, from Mount Joy in Lancaster County. My brother and I are in a partnership and operate an 800-head cattle feedlot. We are the seventh generation of Nissley’s on our farm and are in the process of bringing in the eighth generation to the business.

We have 13,175 cattle farms in the state of Pennsylvania with 1.6 million head in the state with a value of over 700 million dollars. Those 13,175 cattle farms consist of cow/calf, stocker, and feedlot operations. The cow/calf and stocker businesses are mostly in the northeast, central and western areas of the state. The feedlot operations are mostly concentrated in the southeast area of the state. Pennsylvania has two major national packers in the state (JBS in Souderton and Cargill in Wyalusing) plus a large in state cow slaughter plant. These packers are vital to our cattle industry. If Pennsylvania were to lose one of these plants, it would be devastating to the cattle industry, not only in our state, but in our region. These plants have an enormous effect on the local economies in the areas where they are located.

In addition, we have the good fortune in this state to have many small local Butcher shops where smaller cattle producers can market their cattle, and smaller businesses can make a decent living. These butcher shops also help the local economies and sell PA raised cattle to consumers. Between the large packers and the small local shops, we are extremely blessed to have many avenues for cattle processing, and it’s critical that we don’t lose them. Continued growth on the front side of the cattle industry can happen only when the processing side is at full capacity.

"The State of the Livestock Industry: Producer Perspective"

Pennsylvania cattle numbers are increasing over the years but with growth come challenges. For the cow/calf and the stocker feeder access to grass is a challenge. Besides competing with urban sprawl for grass access, farmers may need fencing and fertilizer to grow quality grass. These are all expenses they will incur to expand their herd size. There are, however, grass areas that are not being used for grazing because of access to those areas.

Regulations are another challenge cattle producers will have to work with in their operations. Mandated regulations, paperwork, meeting with consultants, etc....adds cost to the bottom line of any cattle operation. Cattle farmers across the country have been praised for being sustainable keepers of the land, and Pennsylvania cattle producers are no exception. For most producers, this includes storm water management, Chesapeake Bay watershed regulations, stream management and also building projects. The regulations and permits associated with each are cumbersome and time consuming, but a necessary part of farming.

Another challenge producers have is access to veterinary care in certain areas of the state. As you can imagine, cattle are raised, in some cases, in very remote parts of the state, so having a veterinarian on-call and able to respond quickly to an emergency is not always guaranteed. As producers, we care about the welfare and well-being of our animals and we need access to a veterinarian for questions about animal care, and also to develop a vet-client relationship program that allows us to purchase certain medicines.

In a quick snapshot of the state, we have a tremendous amount of beef producers with ample access to big and small processing facilities, but face continued challenges with finding land, finding vets and dealing with environmental impact regulations.

“The State of the Livestock Industry: Producer Perspective”

We have been extremely fortunate, as cattle producers in this state, to receive 1.4 million dollars last year as part of the state budget’s Ag Excellence Beef Line-Item. Through this amazing opportunity, the Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group (made up of representatives from the major state beef organizations) distributed money for the Penn State Extension Livestock team to put on extremely beneficial management meetings, it helped provide grants for buildings and bull purchases, and it helped with educational opportunities for producers to become better managers by attending workshops and field days. Let me give you a little more detail on that.

One of the greatest headlines created from this funding was for the PA Beef to PA Schools program. This is a 50/50 cost share program with schools that allow them to purchase and serve local, PA-grown beef in the cafeterias. In one year, the program exploded from 32 school districts to 120, covering 25% of all public schools and reaching 70% of the counties in the commonwealth. We also heard that on days when local PA-beef is served, attendance at school is up!

Another program made possible by this funding is the brand-new Beefing up Backpacks program, which sources a PA shelf-stable meat stick to support weekend backpack programs for food-insecure students.

Also, with this funding, the Center for Beef Excellence has written grants for farm and herd improvements for producers, and funding for the Veterinary Excellence Initiative Grant Program, which helps veterinarians purchase equipment and enhance their infrastructure to better serve the beef industry.

"The State of the Livestock Industry: Producer Perspective"

Finally, funding used by the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association went toward educational sessions during the annual meeting, support of field day events and youth development activities. Independent from the line-item funding, PA Cattlemen's raises money itself to support state and national lobbying efforts. Currently PCA has over 700 members, 21 Industry Partners and 7 breed affiliate associations...and we're not done growing yet! We continue to provide our membership with cutting-edge information and events, while also strengthening our relationships with local, state and national legislators. We want to be the first organization a government official thinks of if they have concerns about how certain legislation will affect the Pennsylvania cattle producer.

From education and nutrition to handling facilities and planning for succession, the reach of this Ag Excellence Beef funding was tremendous! Combined efforts from Penn State Extension Livestock Team, Pennsylvania Beef Council, Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association, Center for Beef Excellence, Center for Dairy Excellence, producers and other industry affiliates have worked hard to put this money to good use...and they were successful! As you know, the 2025-2026 state budget has not been finalized, and currently only \$600,000 has been allocated for this funding, which is \$800,00 less than last year. To keep this momentum going in both the cattle producer and consumer side of things, we need to have the Ag Excellence Beef Line-Item restored to its 1.4-million-dollar level.

As a cattle producer of Pennsylvania, I strongly support funding the Ag Excellence Beef Line-Item because of the benefits it has given Pennsylvania Cattlemen for the past years with a high Return on Investment. I am proud to be a part of the PA Beef Working Group because this group works together as a team for the benefit of all cattle producers in Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh

"The State of the Livestock Industry: Producer Perspective"

Steelers did not win 6 super bowls because of one team member. They won 6 super bowls as a Team. The PA Beef working group may not win a super bowl, but they will work as a team to make the Pennsylvania cattle producers better...and that makes us all winners!

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to both committees.

Joint House and Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee Hearing

Good Morning,

Thank you for inviting me. I am Glenn Gorrell, my wife Robin and I operate a 1st generation dairy farm in East Smithfield in Bradford County. We started with nothing right here in Centre Co. in 1981 and moved to our current location in 1989. I like to think I represent all PA. dairy farmers, in the past I have been the President of the Professional Dairy Managers of PA. and the Bradford Co. Extension Board, as well as a member of the Center for Dairy Excellence board and former Land O Lakes delegate. We have three daughters, with the oldest being a dairy farmer and PSU grad.

Dairy farming has changed a lot in our 44 years of dairy farming. Herd size has grown, production has grown, investments in operations have increased many fold. Dairy cows still require a lot of labor and skill to be productive and profitable. Domestic labor has not kept up. Farms have turned to Hispanic labor to bridge the gap, but as we know from watching the news, nobody is safe. What does this say for food safety?? This isn't the only labor problem we see at the farm, our support services, such as the machinery mechanics, are not there!! We as farmers have to be more of our own mechanics more than ever. It seems like you need to own more equipment on the farm to get your work done.

We do use H2A, which is not perfect, but needs to be fixed to get livestock producers all year employees. H2A is not a cheap source of labor, nor is it a source of highly trained individuals. The Federal government sets the hourly rate, which basically has increased about a dollar per hour the last three years, provide housing, transportation from their housing to the farm, and their plane ticket to and from their home country, which for us, has been South Africa. The plane tickets alone is over \$1700.00. Since I am the HR guy on the farm also, try figuring out who is going to help make your farm better talking on Whats Up App!! I can truly tell you I hired Forrest Gump's cousin this spring, luckily he has moved on to North Dakota!

Input costs are always on our lists. Electricity costs on our farm just doubled in the last month, a \$5,000.00 increase!! Why?? Coal plants gone, it's buying our electricity? Environmentalists win again?

The tariff thing is real, we see many things we buy increase dramatically, guess it doesn't come from USA!

Large animal veterinarians are another concern moving forward. When I moved to Bradford Co. there were five clinics that provided services to dairy producers. Now there are 2, less vets and the average dairy farm better be able to do about 90% of what the vet can do. They spend a lot of windshield time everyday, but are great for consulting when they can't make it.

Dairy farmers live and die with the weather. This year has been very trying for most of the state. Way above average rainfall in May and June has wreaked havoc on corn planting, soybean planting, and a hay making. Hay not harvested on time means high fiber levels, which in turn means lower milk production, no matter how much more grain you feed at a higher cost. We in the Northern Tier are still trying to

finish some 1st cutting hay. Corn is up to 45 days late in planting, which will effect yield and quality. Basically, we had to work twice as much to get the crop in to get 2/3 of the yield!!

Things that the state can possibly help with. Why does Pennsylvania continue to lose out to New York on new processing operations in the dairy industry? Milk always moved South, out of New England, New York to PA. In the next year or so, more milk will be moving North, just like it did when Chobani opened years ago. We know that the Eastern half of PA is in a great place for commerce, it doesn't take a rocket scientist in an airplane at night to see where the population is. We need to take advantage of that whenever we can.

The average dairy farmer is old, so I am told. My wife and I would like to help a young couple that would like to start, something nobody was interested in doing for us. We are currently trying to help a young couple with experience, but limited equity, and have hit a pretty big wall. How are young producers going to get started?? Are we going to have to sell to someone with old money??

One thing we all will appreciate here in the Northern Tier, opening up more Sundays for hunting!! We only own 435 acres of ground and rent the rest. We do not control the hunting rights on any of it, but we get to feed the deer and bear all year long. Anybody that puts a seed in the ground is happy for more days of open hunting!!

Thank you for your time,

Glenn Gorrell

Introduction –

Good Morning everyone –

For those that do not know who I am – I am Tessa Applegate, I am the 4th generation of ownership, alongside my brother Will, at Clark's Feed Mill. I received my bachelor's degree in accounting and my master's degree in business both from Bloomsburg University. I started my career in the public sector and came home to the family business in early 2019 after our longtime controller decided to retire. A little background of our family - My great-grandfather built our first feed mill in 1929, manufacturing all types of feed at the time, but later evolving into the poultry industry in the mid-50s, which is where we are today – running a small grow-out consisting of approximately 400k broilers per week and manufacturing primarily chicken feed. I'm also excited to share that our operation continues to grow, and we're currently preparing to break ground on a new feed mill facility—a significant milestone for our family.

I'd like to thank the House and Senate Ag & Rural Affairs Committee for inviting me to speak today, and I also want to acknowledge and thank all the legislators in attendance – Representative Pashinski, Moul, Vogel and Schwank – thank you for being here and all that you do to support us! Congressman Thompson, it is truly an honor to be on this panel with you and I am humbled to be here. This is my first time speaking publicly within the ag industry, so I appreciate your patience, as I'm honored to be included among today's speakers. I've been asked to share what the state of the livestock industry looks like from a producer's perspective, and I'll do my best to convey, in just a few words, what that looks like from where I stand.

To kick things off, let's take a look at the current state of the poultry industry—because it's booming. Between 2017 and 2021, U.S. poultry production surged by 55%, reaching \$77 billion dollars. I came across an article in the Lancaster Farming last year where Ag Secretary Redding called it a historic moment: that according to the USDA's 2022 Census of Agriculture, poultry officially became Pennsylvania's top agl sector by revenue, hitting \$2.6 billion for the first time. More and more farmers are choosing to diversify by adding poultry housing to their operations— what a great time it is to be in the chicken business.

I wish I could stand here and say that's the whole story—that everything is smooth sailing. But as we all know, with every blessing comes a set of challenges. So while the poultry industry continues to grow, it does so in the face of ongoing threats. That same article highlighting the industry's success also pointed to one of its greatest challenges since then: the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). In March 2023, Pennsylvania reported the highest number of cases in both commercial flocks and backyard birds nationwide.

AND it doesn't stop at HPAI – the entire industry is at risk daily to the threat of disease and that is why it is important for me to point out the monumental success that the senate and house has had in recognizing and protecting animal welfare. The director of Penn State's Animal Diagnostic Lab has credited strong collaboration between government agencies and farmers for helping to reduce the spread across the state. The industry has adapted to a new normal—one that prioritizes strict biosecurity measures and the health of these animals. I can confidently say, on behalf of producers across the state, that we're incredibly grateful for the programs and funding Pennsylvania has provided to help mitigate this risk. Several strong initiatives have been implemented to help cover costs related to bird flu testing, lost income, and enhanced biosecurity measures, including the HPAI Recovery Reimbursement Grant, which offers up to \$25,000 per premise. At Clark's, we're utilizing this program by investing in new disinfectant systems and laser bird deterrents at our facility, with plans to apply for the sixth round of state funding. As of today, Pennsylvania has awarded more than \$14.5 million to hundreds of farmers over the past three years. Even more importantly, that is just a fraction of the \$100 million-dollar, unprecedented investment by the commonwealth in animal welfare across the state. As we all continue to adapt to this new normal and manage the ongoing risk of avian influenza and diseases alike, it's reassuring to know that the state is standing with us—acknowledging both the threat and its economic impact.

Governor Shapiro was quoted saying that, 'economic growth and opportunity flow right through our farmlands'—and he's absolutely right. Agriculture is more than an industry; it's a way of life that we must actively work to protect. As a fourth-generation producer, I've come to deeply appreciate how meaningful and vital this work truly is. Another program we're particularly excited about is the Ag Innovation Grant, which we hope to participate in down the line. This initiative supports both farmers and agri-producers in adopting new technologies that help drive innovation, strengthen operations, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry.

During the COVID era—when remote work and shutdowns became the norm—essential workers came into focus, and society gained a clearer understanding of what truly matters. Agriculture stood out as the backbone of that reality. Our industry quite literally feeds the world, and that responsibility depends on a vast network of people, processes, and perseverance to make it all possible.

My dad, Rob Clark, often reminds us, "We're not in the t-shirt business—a size 16 today isn't a size 16 tomorrow." In other words, there's no certainty in agriculture. Every day brings new variables. Chickens must be fed—every single day—regardless of the weather, a

breakdown at the feed mill, or any other obstacle. And tomorrow, that same 4-pound bird won't weigh 4 pounds anymore. Every day, every input matters.

For someone to sit down and enjoy a chicken dinner, a long chain of events has to happen: breeders must lay eggs, hatcheries must ensure hatchability, farmers must have the resources to build housing and raise the birds. The process is complex and interconnected, and we could spend hours walking through each step. But the key point is this: when you evaluate a growing industry, you have to consider the entire system behind the finished product to truly understand its challenges.

So why has food become more expensive? The answer is simple—our input costs keep rising. From construction and electricity to transportation and labor, it's impossible to lower the cost of the final product when every piece of the puzzle is becoming more expensive.

One of the major challenges facing our industry is the difficulty in acquiring poultry housing. For example, our operation—like many others—spans multiple counties. But even within a single county, regulations can vary drastically from one township to another. A farmer trying to build in one township may face dramatically different financial hurdles than a farmer just a few miles away. In fact, one may pay over twice as much in taxes and three times more in permitting fees than the other.

These disparities become even more pronounced when comparing county to county. Some may point to the Clean and Green program as a potential solution—and it is, in many ways. This state-led initiative encourages farmland preservation by offering tax savings to landowners, allowing them to continue farming or diversify their operations while managing costs like taxes. It's a strong step in the right direction.

However, the problem lies in inconsistent participation. Not all counties have implemented the program. While someone might suggest, "Just buy farmland in the right county," most of us know that farmland is often a family legacy—passed down through generations—and relocating isn't a realistic option.

The tools to help farmers already exist at the state level, but whether they can be used depends on where you farm. Township and county-level regulations create a patchwork of rules and costs that can make it difficult to grow. As input costs—especially taxes—continue to rise, farmers are left with tough choices: either don't build, which limits housing availability, or ask for higher payments to offset increased expenses.

At the end of the day, every farmer needs a margin to stay in business. If we can't maintain it, that burden eventually falls on the consumer. For small, independently operated

businesses like ours, which aren't vertically integrated and have less margin to work with, the pressure to remain competitive is even greater.

That's why I challenge our state legislators to take action—to help regulate and align township and county policies in a way that levels the playing field and upholds our farmers' right to farm.

Amid all this, we also face ongoing challenges at the federal level, as we work tirelessly to keep up with changing regulations from Packers and Stockyards. However, since this is a state hearing, I'll reserve those concerns for what I hope will be a future conversation with Congressman Thompson.

At the state level, the administration continues to recognize agriculture as the backbone of Pennsylvania's economy. With ongoing support through state budget allocations for agricultural initiatives, I'm confident our industry will not only thrive but remain strong for generations to come.