

USDA Secretary Mike Johanns
Listening Session on 2007 Farm Bill
Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences
Ag Progress Days
Rock Springs, Pa
August 16, 2005

Testimony by
Chad Forcey

Director of Government Relations for the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association
(PLNA)

Mr. Secretary, thank you for coming to Pennsylvania and for your interest in the concerns of Pennsylvania agriculture.

My name is Chad Forcey, and I am the Government Relations Director of the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association (PLNA). PLNA represents predominantly family-owned businesses in Pennsylvania's \$5.6 billion landscape, nursery and retail garden center industry; known as the green industry. The green industry employs over 100,000 Pennsylvanians, is Pennsylvania's largest cash crop and is the fastest growing segment of agriculture in Pennsylvania. Nationally, nursery and greenhouse production represents 11% of commodity agriculture.

The green industry has not played a major role in previous farm bills due to the fact that the green industry is a non-subsidized component of agriculture. The green industry does not seek subsidies, but stands in need of research and development funding. Penn State's College of Ag Sciences has provided such research and development, supported by farm bill grant funding. PLNA asks that this funding continue, as the partnership between the College and the green industry has been immensely beneficial to Pennsylvania nurseries, landscape contractors, and garden centers.

With new major challenges such as the Asian Longhorn Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer and *Phytophthora Ramorum*, the green industry must be equipped to respond to the next disease or pest crisis. Farm Bill funding can help bridge the widening gap between current resources and these needs. Historically, the Commodity Credit Corporation has been a strong funding source for quarantine and eradication efforts, but Congress has been scaling back access to the program. USDA Aphis stands as a major federal source of funding, and it is greatly appreciated. But more is needed to ensure the short and long-term safety and stability of our nursery and greenhouse crops.

The challenge of invasive species is another area in our industry that suffers for lack of strong scientific research. Research in this relatively new field is desperately needed, but funding is scarce and difficult to find. The 2007 Farm Bill could provide additional grant dollars for the issue of invasive species so the industry can better understand the implications of certain plants in both our landscapes and forest lands.

Finally, I want to direct your attention to the most vexing problem in the green industry. Our industry's greatest need is access to sufficient labor. Senator Larry Craig of Idaho – a farmer himself – has put forward an AgJOBS bill that will put American agriculture on the right track to solving the labor problem. AgJOBS provides a road map to better national security and economic security, and will ensure that the green industry has the labor it so desperately needs. Mr. Secretary, with your leadership on the issue of labor and immigration reform within the Administration, we will meet this challenge and continue to grow American agriculture to meet the demands of a new century. Thank you.

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Testimony by
Norman K. Lathbury
Coordinator, Centre County Agricultural Land Preservation Program

Good Morning Secretary Johanns, Dean Steele, distinguished guests and farm owners. I am speaking on behalf of the members of the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Association and would like to highlight several concerns relative to:

Question 1. With regard to the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, Pennsylvania as well as other states have legislated programs in place, such as Pennsylvania's Act 43, that provide the process and procedures for farmland preservation. Pennsylvania along with other states, such as Maryland, lead the nation in farmland preservation. Because of Pennsylvania's well established program, there have been no federal violations in the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.

Therefore, Pennsylvania and the counties that participate with the Bureau of Farmland Preservation program in the Department of Agriculture should be exempt from the federal policy requirements. Especially the 2% limit on impervious cover because many family farms that otherwise qualify for our preservation program are reluctant to agree to the Federal Addendum to the Deed of Easement because the relatively small acreages ranging on the average from less than 100 to 175 acres. Many county Agricultural Land Preservation Boards are also reluctant to participate and therefore do not submit farms for federal funding.

In 2003, Pennsylvania had 41 farms approved for the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. In 2004, 19 farms were approved. Consequently, only half of the nearly \$5 million allocated to Pennsylvania was used because of the restrictions. I feel certain that this is a sterling example of unintended consequences.

Question 3. Fruit and vegetable growers should be included in the farm subsidies program. These farm families should be eligible to receive a fair share of what is perceived by many as preferential treatment and payments to the lobby-strong food corporations. The interest by consumers to purchase locally grown products is steadily increasing, thereby encouraging farmers to expand their operations in a very tight market. Subsidies would add a significant financial incentive to broaden their investment.

Question 4. The Joint Committee on Taxation has recommended that charitable gifts be eliminated or severely curtailed as a result of some unscrupulous behavior on the part of a few so called non-profit organizations. The consequence to this recommendation will have a significant impact on bargain sales, installment payments and like-kind exchanges

because there will be no tax incentives for the land owners to participate. Some of our county Agricultural Land Preservation Board offer only bargain sales as a way to stretch very limited resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these concerns.

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