

PENNSYLVANIA FARMLAND PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION
2025 Fall Business Meeting
 Virtual Meeting
 November 5, 2025

Attendance:

Executive Committee: Ellen Dayhoff (Adams County, President), Amada Burkard-Sell (Vice President, Berks County), Stephanie Williams (Treasurer, Cumberland County) Caroline Sinchar, At Large, Washington County) Diana Griffith (Membership Coordinator, Centre County), Vacant (Secretary)

PDA – Bureau of Farmland Preservation Staff:

Stephanie Zimmerman, Director, Bureau of Farmland Preservation; Amy Cooper; Neil Imes; April Orwig; Andrea Reiner; Chris Snyder

County Administrators and County Staff:

<u>County</u>		<u>County</u>	
Adams	Mark Clowney	Lancaster	Matt Knepper
Berks	Kimberly Fies	Lebanon	Craig Zemitis
Blair	Donna Fisher	Lebanon	Hannah Hartman
Blair	Rich Huether	Lehigh	Diane Matthews-Gehring
Butler	Sheryl Kelly	Montgomery	Anne Leavitt-Gruberger
Chester	Geoffrey Shellington	Montgomery	Stephen Zbyszinski
Chester	Evan Martin	Northhampton	Ryan Shaw
Clearfield	Eric Fox	Northhampton	Claire Wessner
Crawford	Tracey Crawford	Schuylkill	Kelse Brown
Crawford	Dick Deiss	Sullivan	Carrie Richmond
Cumberland	Elizabeth Grant	Sullivan	Lynn Broschart
Franklin	Quentin Clapper	Tioga	Kaye Aumick
Franklin	Liz Butler	Union	Greg Bonsall
Juniata	Lori Glace	York	Eric Naylor
Juniata	Brent Leach	York	David Boose

Guests and Speakers:

Russell Redding, Secretary of Agriculture
 Doug Wolfgang, PA State Conservation Commission
 Sarah Xenophon, PA State Conservation Commission

I. Welcome and Introductions:

- **Welcome:** Ellen Dayhoff welcomed attendees and introduced special guest Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding.
- **Recognitions and Milestones**
 - **Berks County:** 80,000 acres celebrated in June
 - **Cumberland County:** 25,000 acres celebrated in August

- **Lancaster County** hit 90,000 acres with county alone. Just shy of 125,000 acres with Lancaster Farm Trust.
- **York County** hit 50,000 acres in August
- **Franklin County:** 20,000 acres celebrated in September
- **Washington County:** 50 farms celebrated in September

II. **Address by Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding**

- Highlighted 650,000 collective wins for PA agriculture, stressed advocacy/collaboration, and urged future focus on generational transfers, farm viability, and conservation grant emphasis. Emphasized need for a PA agricultural strategic plan due to federal budget impacts.
- Noted that federal budget challenges are impacting animal health and food charities, making ongoing support and teamwork critical.

III. **Business Meeting**

A. **Opening**

1. **Call to Order:** President Ellen Dayhoff (Adams County) called the business meeting to order at 9:06 AM.
2. **Appointment of Acting Secretary:** Ellen Dayhoff (Adams County) appointed Caroline Sinchar (Washington County) as acting Secretary to record minutes of the meeting.
 - **Motion:** Matt Knepper (Lancaster County) and Eric Naylor (York County) seconded.
 - **Outcome:** Motion passed.
3. **Poll of Voting Members:** Diana Griffiths polled the membership naming voting members as well as the proxy.
 - **Report:** 24 total voting members, with 16 in attendance, confirming a quorum.

B. **Business Agenda Items**

1. **Minutes of May 13, 2025:** Caroline Sinchar (Washington County) presented the minutes. Under Guests and Speakers, Melissa Hanner, NRCS was added.
 - **Motion:** Matt Knepper (Lancaster County) moved to approve the minutes from May 13, seconded by Stephanie Williams (Cumberland County).
 - **Outcome:** Motion passed.
2. **Treasurer's Report:** Stephanie Williams (Cumberland County) reported:
 - Last reporting period (April) balance: \$8,708.00
 - Less spring meeting ending balance: \$7,896.00.
 - Noted that expenditures exceeded income by almost \$1,000, emphasizing the role of registration and membership fees in supporting the organization.

- **Motion:** Caroline Sinchar (Washington County) moved to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented, seconded by Matt Knepper (Lancaster County).
 - **Outcome:** Motion passed.
- 3. Membership Committee:** Diana Griffith reported the current membership numbers:
- 21 voting members for fall 2025
 - 29 memberships have lapsed.
 - Discussion: Question raised regarding whether the executive committee should address membership issues separately from the conference: Diana Griffith confirms January communication to counties regarding dues.

C. Legislative Updates (Matt Knepper, Lancaster County)

- 1. HB 1059 – Land Trust Funding Bill:**
 - Summarized details from prior meetings and noted PFPA is already on record opposing prior version (HB 1777).
 - **Poll:** Counties were not in support (1 county in support, others opposed).
 - **Motion:** Eric Naylor (York County) moved to oppose the bill, seconded by Caroline Sinchar (Washington County).
 - **Vote:** 14 – Yes, 1- No.
 - **Outcome:** Motion passed to oppose the bill.
- 2. HB 1584 – Transfer/Addition of Less Than 10 Acres:**
 - **Description:** Allows for the transfer of less than 10 acres from one preserved farm to another and allows for less than 10 acres to be added to a preserved farm.
 - **Discussion Points:**
 - Members discussed whether the land must meet productivity standards. It was noted that while the specific acreage minimum is waived, the land generally must still meet other standard requirements.
 - It was clarified that rights to additional residential structure cannot be transferred to the parcel being moved/added. Participants advocated for explicitly excluding the additional residential structure provision.
 - It was confirmed that a deed of merger is required.
 - Questions were raised about the specific process of "added to the easement" versus the standard practice of creating a new easement for preserved land.
 - Clarification was sought on whether this policy applies to new amendments or existing easements, specifically regarding the phrasing "new easement to acquire land."

- **Poll:** Counties were in support
- **Motion:** Caroline Sinchar (Washington County) moved to support the bill, seconded by Kelse Brown.
- **Vote:** 13 – Yes, 1 – abstained (Butler County).
- **Outcome:** Motion passed to support the bill.

D. Old Business

1. **PFFA Website Update:** Caroline Sinchar (Washington County) presented the updated and final edits to the PFFA website, went live on October 29.
 - **Request:** A request was made for counties to submit images of preserved farms for the website.

E. Nominating Committee (Chair: Matt Knepper, Lancaster County)

1. **Election of Officers (2-year term): Matt Knepper presented the nominations. A poll was sent to all voting members.**
 - **Nominations:**
 - President: Amanda Burkard-Sell (Berks County)
 - Vice-President: Stephanie Williams (Cumberland County)
 - Secretary: Caroline Sinchar (Washington County)
 - Treasurer: Kelse Brown (Schuylkill County)
 - Member At Large: Eric Naylor (York County)
 - **Motion:** Matt Knepper (Lancaster County) moved to accept Election of Officers as presented, seconded by Kimberly Fies (Berks County).
 - **Poll:** 13 – Yes, 0 - No
 - **Outcome:** The nominated slate of officers was unanimously approved. The new officers will begin their terms effective at the close of today's business meeting.

F. New Business

1. **Membership Coordinator Resignation:**
 - **Discussion:** Nature of the Membership Coordinator position is a very part-time role that experiences a significantly heavier workload during the spring and fall season.
 - **Motion:** Kimberly Fies (Berks County) moved to accept the resignation of the Membership Coordinator, seconded by Eric Naylor (York County).
 - **Vote:** 14 – Yes, 0 – No.
 - **Outcome:** Motion passed to accept resignation.
2. **Spring 2026 Conference Location:**
 - The topic of the Spring 2026 Conference was opened for discussion.

- It was announced that We Conserve PA is scheduled to be in Lancaster in April 29 – May 1.
- The Chair solicited interest from members or counties willing to host the spring conference.

Remarks by Doug Wolfgang – PA State Conservation Commission

- **Congratulations:** For preserving 650,000 acres/6500 farms; acknowledged bipartisan success.
- **Specific Shout-outs:** Stephanie Zimmerman and county administrators.
- **Milestones:** Congrats on all milestones.
- **Budget & Funding (ACAP):** 154M ARPA funds (to be spent by 2026). Mentioned agronomics, cover crops partially funded by ACAP.

Presentation by Sarah Xenophon – PA State Conservation Commission, Director of the Commission’s Farm Viability & Natural Resource Division

- The Pennsylvania Agriculture Conservation Stewardship (PACS) program is a voluntary certification initiative administered by the SCC. It is designed to recognize and reward farmers who go above and beyond baseline regulatory compliance to demonstrate exceptional environmental stewardship.
- Slide show will be shared with PFFA.

Remarks by Stephanie Zimmerman - Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Farmland Preservation

- **County Admin Feedback:** Will solicit feedback on Sarah Xenophon’s presentation.
- **Program Milestones:** Thanks for Oct 15 event. Exceeded 6600 farms (Oct meeting), anticipate 660,000 acres (Dec).
- **America's 250th & PA Farm Show:** Farmland preservation will be integrated into 2026 festivities.
- **Upcoming Trainings:** None for Nov/Dec. Send ideas to Stephanie.
- **Recertification (2026):** 20 counties need to recertify. Start early, contact Chris Snyder. Ensure Act 33 language.
- **Encumbering Funds:** \$18M needs encumbered by Dec 31 (2024 funds). Contact Andrea. Most items needed except survey (clear title, subordinations).
- **County Certification of Funds:** Counties should expect by December board meeting; due Jan 31. Last year: \$17.9M recertified.
- **County Admin Annual Survey:** Coming in Dec, due Dec 31. Beneficial for Bureau discussions.
- **December State Board Meeting:** Dec 11. 2026 board meetings dates distributed.
- **Farm Photos:** Needed for press releases.
- **Checks Process:** Improved with cross-training, two people working.

- **PA Farmland Project (Ownership Change/Inspection):** Up and running, new inspection component for immediate reporting of violations.
- **Federal Farm Bill:** No major impact currently. Farm disaster bill expected post-furlough. Don't expect Farm Bill updates before Spring 2026.
- **AFT (American Farmland Trust):** Making fixes; no legislation. Buy/Protect/Sell concept doesn't align with PA program.
- **ACEP (\$1.2M/yr) & RCPP (3M in Kittatinny Ridge, 1M statewide for preserved farms):** Deadlines exist (e.g., March 1), but federal shutdown caused delays. Submit applications now.
- **Federal Shutdown Impact on Closings:** Cannot take new federal farms to state board. June, Aug, Oct farms stuck without Acceptance Page.
- **Monitoring/Inspections:**
 - **Federal inspections deadline:** June 30.
 - **High Path Avian Flu:** 6 positive cases in Lancaster County; use best judgment for inspecting poultry operations.
 - **Annual Report:** Federal annual/biannual inspection report due March 1 (inspected, violations, corrected). Only received 28 reports in 2025 from 2024 inspections.
- **Farm Vitality Grants:** \$400,000 available; max increased to \$15,000.
- **New Guidebook:** Delayed to 2026.
- **County-Only Farms (Ranking Order):** Permitted in specific situations (e.g., municipal funding, 138e.66). Requires county justification and state board approval.
- **IRS 8283 Forms:** State signs off last. Stephanie Zimmerman is unable to confirm if 8283 form used if county pays full appraised value.
- **Regulations:** No movement on agreements/deeds of easements.
- **Bureau Appreciation:** Thanks staff. Hopes for additional staff with America's 250th.
- **Century/Bicentennial Farm Program:** Seeking preserved farms 250+ years; 9 will be presented.

G. Current Issues and Roundtable Discussion

1. Baseline Reports (Stephanie Williams, Cumberland County)

- **Poll:** How many counties do baseline report? Yes: 4 and No: 11
- **Presentation:** A baseline report is best management practice recommended by land trust. These reports document farm conditions (via photo and text) at the time of preservation, providing a reference point to resolve future disputes.
- **Discussion:** One county reported identifying curtilage during the initial survey, employing drone technology to document the area,

including septic systems and wells. They emphasized that establishing these boundaries at the time of settlement is critical for preventing future disputes regarding large residential structures (“McMansions”). In contrast, another county utilizes hand digitization to map impervious surfaces.

- Stephanie Zimmerman explained that all farms preserved with federal funds require a baseline report. These must include a survey, conservation plan, maps (topo, tax, soil), and color photos from the day of preservation, though the specific level of detail is up to the county.

2. Rural Enterprises

- **Educational Center proposed** (Sheryl Kelly, Butler County):
 - **Presentation:** Reported on a 71-acre farm in Cranberry Township, preserved in 2006. Following the owner's death, the Township assumed ownership to continue his vision through a nonprofit. The plan involves creating an educational center featuring hiking trails, orchards, and converting barns into classrooms to host student field trips (e.g., viewing milking operations). Active farming is currently maintained by a farm manager.
 - **Challenges & Concerns:**
 - a. **Infrastructure:** There are logistical concerns regarding the single-lane gravel driveway, which is unsuitable for bus traffic.
 - b. **Regulatory Compliance:** A conflict exists regarding "Rural Enterprise" guidelines, which currently stipulate that the enterprise operator must reside on the farm.
 - **Legal Pressure:** The Township faces potential legal repercussions if they refuse to submit the application for the project.
 - **Discussion:** Highlighted the logistical challenges of these centers, specifically the requirement to install new septic systems and restrooms. The group debated the need to incentivize farm operations against preservation goals. While agricultural education is viewed as a positive activity, the primary concern remains preventing any use that takes land out of agricultural production. Members noted two prior examples like the current proposal.
- **Hunting Preserve**
 - Concerns were raised regarding the expansion of hunting fields on a preserved farm, specifically regarding the long-term impact of lead shot accumulation. It was suggested that the Conservation District be consulted.

- **Rural Enterprise Application**
 - Counties that have a Rural Enterprise Application should send to the landowner requesting project details.
 - Confirmed that Board approval is necessary for Rural Enterprises. While the form itself might not be mandatory, using it is the most efficient way to gather the data needed for approval.
 - Stephanie Zimmerman noted that any revisions to bylaws do not exempt landowners from the application process. She emphasized that landowners have no valid grounds to refuse completing the application.

A motion to adjourn the business meeting by Kim Feis and seconded by Eric Naylor at 11:39.

Minutes compiled by: Caroline Sinchar, Member at Large

11-26-2025 *Caroline Sinchar*