

# AG QUARTERLY

January 2025



BERKS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



## WHAT WE DO

The Berks County Department of Agriculture promotes agriculture in Berks County by preserving farmland, invigorating agricultural economic development, and connecting our community to agricultural resources.

## WHO WE ARE

We are a department of the County of Berks, established in 2015 to serve Berks County residents. We are a team of seven staff who are dedicated to ensuring a thriving agricultural industry in Berks County.

### Credits

Content and editing by Berks County Dept. of Agriculture staff; template design by Rick Royer, Berks County Planning.  
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**Photo credit:**  
**Renningers Kutztown Farmers and Antiques Market**

# PRESERVATION SPOTLIGHT

## Griesemer Beekeeping - Griesemer Family Settlement #579

*Excerpts from "A Dream Come True" by Clyde A. B. Myers,  
originally published in the Reading Eagle.*



- James and Christine Griesemer are proud owners of their 22-acre preserved farm in North Heidelberg Township.
- James operates Griesemer Beekeeping on the farm, raising honeybees, producing honey, promoting pollinators and developing open pollinated vegetable seeds. They have plans to expand with a high tunnel for specialty herbs and an acre of berries.
- Although the family has a history of farming, it has skipped a few generations, so they are first generation farmers.
- The Griesemers' young son, Charles, loves to help with the farm activities every chance he gets.

***"Although we did not benefit financially from the farm preservation program, we know we will benefit for years to come since our farm and the surrounding farms will never be threatened by development."***

**Please see our website for full articles  
on preserved farms.**

# AG LAND PRESERVATION STATS

## 2024 Report



**831**

Farms  
Preserved

**79,314**  
Acres  
Preserved

### 2024 Totals:

Farms preserved: **9**

Acres preserved: **769**

### Program Total:

County invested: **\$85M**

State invested: **\$94M**

Landowner Donated Value: **\$41M**

The Berks County Department of Agriculture oversees the administration of the Agricultural Conservation Easement (ACE) Program, which permanently preserves Berks County's farmland. Berks County is a leader in both the state and the nation for preserved farms and will be celebrating 80,000 acres of preserved farmland later this year.

# Q4 HIGHLIGHTS

## Tractor & Farm Truck Tire Collection

The Department partnered with Allegheny Towing & Salvage to hold a massive tire collection this year. In a combination with dry weather conditions, the public's willingness to participate made 2024's tire collection was the most successful by far. We were able to save **52 tons** from going to the landfill, polluting the land, or becoming home to mosquitos.



## TRACTOR & FARM TRUCK TIRE COLLECTION

## Ag Apprenticeship Recognition

We joined the PA Department of Agriculture and the Center for Dairy Excellence as they celebrated National Apprenticeship Week at the Zahncroft Dairy. The event highlighted the CDE's Dairy Herds Manager Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship program and recognized the importance of the industry and its labor needs.



## 13th Annual Career & Job Fair

The Department hosted its largest Ag & Natural Resources Career & Job Fair at the Leesport Farmer's Market. Exhibitors/employers had the opportunity to interact with over 300 participants. 16 high schools were represented. The fair showcased 40 employers highlighting the diverse employment opportunities in ag and ag-adjacent fields. We received very positive reviews from both participants and exhibitors and look forward to next year's event!



# Q4 HIGHLIGHTS

## Lucky Penny the Pig's Adventures with the Department of Agriculture!



Lucky Penny the Pig graciously visited the Department of Agriculture, letting the good folks at the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) know that she'd be in good hands. She hung out with Rachel from the department, and wanted to remind people to drive safe around farms! She also visited the Penn State Extension, and hung out with the Cow on the second floor. Penny even got to visit with some long lost cousins she hasn't seen in years!

Penny also visited the Career Fair held in November and met many excited fans who took selfies! She hung out with officers from Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, where she learned all about fishing and boating regulations! She also had a good time with the ladies from the Philadelphia District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and they even gave her a sticker!

# OUR WORK IN NUMBERS



## 2024 Q4 Online Presence

Our staff continue to promote agriculture and share resources with thousands of Berks County residents via Facebook, the online Local Food Map, and the Berks Ag Event Calendar.

**5,800**

GrowTogether  
Website Users

**12,869**

Food Map &  
Events Calendar  
Views

**255**

Local Farms &  
Vendors Listed  
on Food Map

**137**

Ag Events  
Listed

**54,793**

Facebook  
Page Views

**87**

Facebook  
Posts



## 2024 Fourth Quarter Events

**300+**

People attended the  
Career Fair

**40**

Exhibitors attended the  
Career Fair

**200+**

Promotional items given  
away at the Career Fair

**30**

Farmers participated in  
the Tire Collection

**52**

Tons of tires collected



# 2024 OBJECTIVES

7

## Fourth Quarter Update

Our team has continued to make key advances on our annual objectives in 2024.

### Continue strengthening the agricultural land preservation program.

- Document and address identified conflicts with terms of the deed of easement and work towards resolution.
- Landscape software:
  - Continued to populate and confirm data in the platform.

### Refining Department of Agriculture's strategy, function, and branding.

- Growing Berks - Ag Study:
  - Refined the Road Map and finalized format and graphics.
  - Presented to Advisory Committee

### Continue to promote the diverse ag career opportunities.

- Presented information on the Department and Ag careers to Reading High Students participating in the BBEC - Students interacting with Business program.
- Staff attended and networked at the BBEC Business and Education Summit.

## STRATEGIC FUNCTION of the Berks County Department of Agriculture



**Want to know more?**  
Don't hesitate to reach out -  
we'd love to hear from you.

# UPCOMING...



Would you like to partner with us for future events? Give us a call or email us: 610-378-1844 or [DeptofAg@BerksPA.gov](mailto:DeptofAg@BerksPA.gov)

## Ag Literacy Week | March 17-21, 2025

**Audience:** Elementary School students

**Description:** Volunteers will read a agriculture themed book to students of Berks County Elementary classrooms, followed by an activity. This year's book is [The Soil In Jackie's Garden](#).

**Partners:** Berks County Schools, B.A.R.N.

*Contact us if you would interested in reading to a classroom!*

## National Ag Day | March 18, 2025

**Audience:** Berks County citizens

**Description:** A presentation and tour focusing on the history of agriculture in Berks County in conjunction with America250PA Berks.

**Partners:** Local historical societies

*Look for more information to follow!*

## 80,000 Acres Preserved Celebration | June 18, 2025

**Audience:** Preserved farm owners, public officials, and those associated with the local ag industry.

**Description:** Ceremonial Banquet followed by a Reading Fightin' Phils game in conjunction with Berks County Farm Bureau Farmers Night at the Stadium.

**Partners:** GRCA, Local agribusinesses, PA Dept. of Agriculture, PA Farm Bureau

# AG NEWSFLASH

## GROWING BERKS

### Berks County Ag Study Nearing Completion

The fact-finding portion of county's ag study, *Growing Berks: Agriculture's Economic Impact and a Roadmap for Its Future*, is now complete. The study compiled available data, incorporated comments from personal interviews and focus groups and used the information to quantify the contribution of agriculture to the county and regional economy and identify key areas of strengths and weaknesses.

The study's *Roadmap for the Future* outlines action items for the county and its partners to take to support the ag industry. The Ag Advisory Committee met to help shape these recommendations, which will serve as a guide the department for the future.

Growing Berks is a component of Imagine Berks and will be used to support and enhance the economic contribution of the agricultural industry in Berks County.

The study will be presented to the County Commissioners at an operations meeting in January.

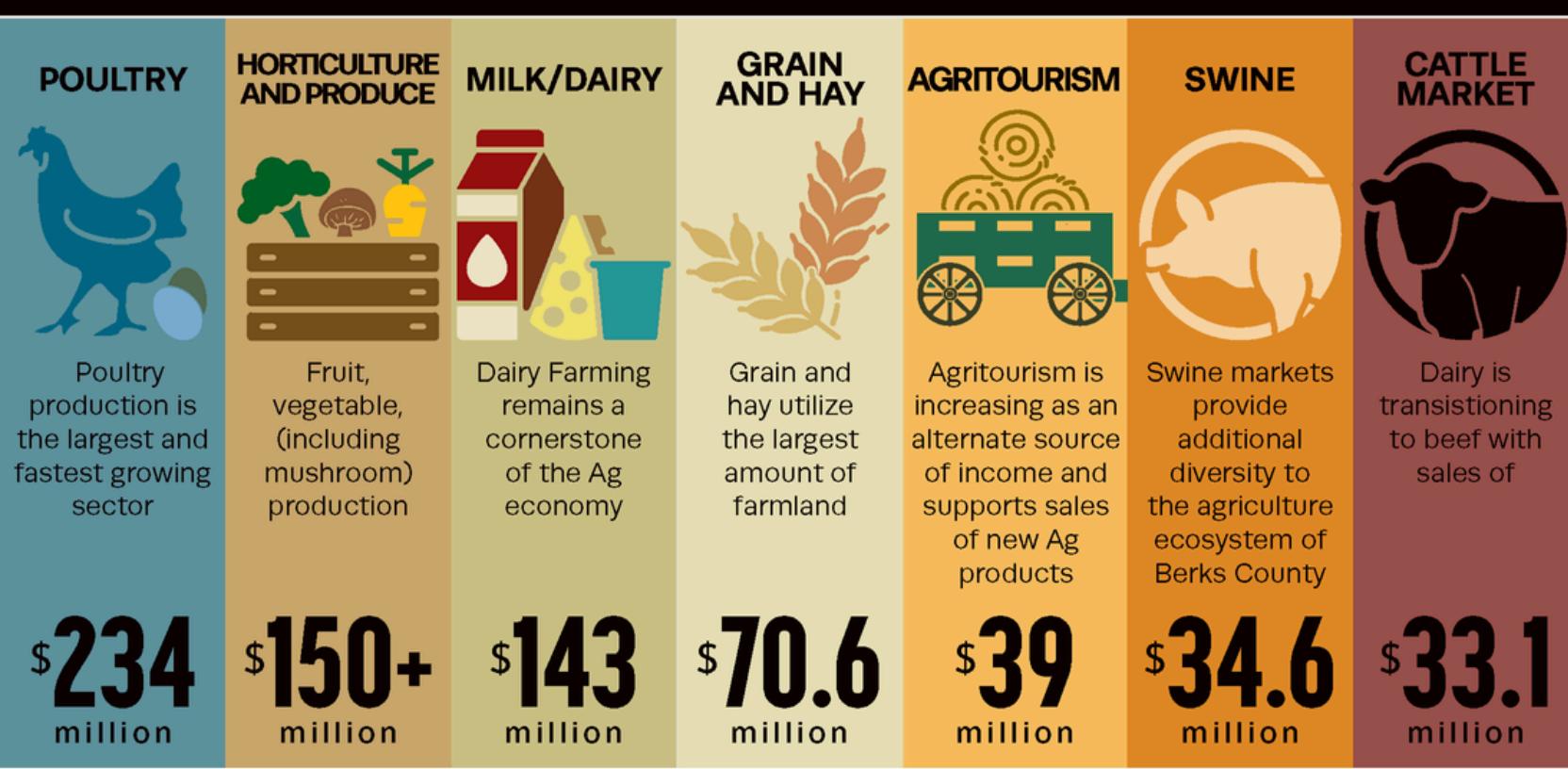


Report  
Coming  
Soon

# BERKS COUNTY AG FACTS



## OUR AG ECONOMY STATS



# GROWING BERKS FOCUS AREAS

- Land Use and Land Security
- Workforce and Career Pathways
- Entrepreneurship and Agri-Business Development

- Technology and the Farm
- Market Development
- Agriculture Finance



## OUR GOALS

**1**  
**PROMOTE**  
agriculture and the agriculture industry as a vital piece of the Berks County economy.

**2**  
**EXPAND**  
local knowledge of agriculture practices and the importance of preservation.

**3**  
**INCREASE**  
business management education for farm transitions.

**4**  
**FOSTER**  
agribusiness entrepreneurship.

**5**  
**ENCOURAGE**  
adoption of innovation and technology.

**6**  
**ENHANCE**  
marketing outreach to support expanding market opportunities and value-added products.

**7**  
**SUPPORT**  
agriculture and the financing options for infrastructure, market growth, and physical expansion and improvements.

**8**  
**LEVERAGE**  
public-private partnerships to expand access to resources, expertise, and capabilities.



## CONTACT US OR STOP BY!

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