

AG QUARTERLY

April 2025



BERKS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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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

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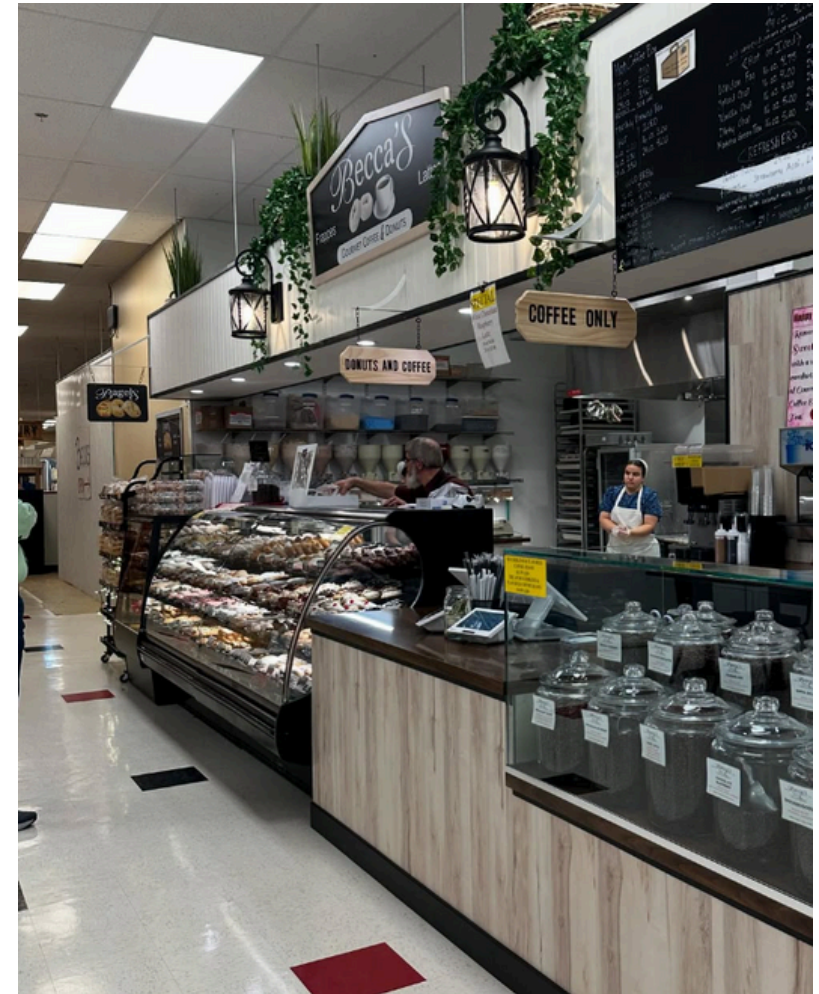


Photo credit:
Berks County Eats, Wyomissing Farmers Market-
Becca's

PRESERVATION SPOTLIGHT

Dove Song Dairy - Schaeffer Family Settlement #323

Excerpts from "It's a Matter of National Security" by Clyde A. B. Myers, originally published in the Reading Eagle.



- Lena Schaeffer and her husband Rodney own Dove Song goat dairy in Jefferson Township, with the help of their 3 children and grandchildren.
- Established in the mid 1700's, the home and neighboring farm total 85 acres.
- Dove Song Dairy makes yogurt, cheese, milk, and pasture raised meats. Goat milk soap, bone broth, soups, fruit spreads, sauerkraut, and other specialty foods are also part of their direct to consumer sales.

"[Farmland Preservation] is a matter of national security. A country that doesn't produce its own food is at the mercy of the supplier." Lena Schaeffer on the importance of preserving farmland.

Please see our website for full articles on preserved farms.



AG LAND PRESERVATION STATS

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2024 Report



834
Farms
Preserved

79,474.8
Acres
Preserved

2025 Totals:

Farms preserved: **3**

Acres preserved: **160.7**

Program Total:

County invested: **\$85.5M**

State invested: **\$94.8M**

Landowner Donated Value: **\$42M**

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.



WEEU

Kim and Pam on WEEU's **Feedback with Bill Saunders** discussing the adoption of the Growing Berks Ag Study, Avian Influenza and the impact on egg prices, and how Ag plays into the overall economic health of the county. Also talked about the Berks County Local Food Map, Farmland Preservation and the June 80,000-acre celebration, Farm Transition Planning, and the future of Ag in Berks!

Ag Literacy Week, March 17-21

The Department donated the book The Soil in Jackie's Garden and worked with B.A.R.N to schedule volunteers to read the agriculture themed book and lead a activity with over 3000 elementary students throughout the County. Our staff joined readers from Cooperating agencies and County Leadership.



13th & Union Career Day

Mary & Rachel spent some time at 13th & Union Elementary School's annual Career Day. The Pre-K morning and afternoon classes were given an introduction to agriculture. Marigold seeds were planted the kids drew flowers. They will get to watch the seeds sprout while participating in more educational activities during the lifecycle of the plants and be able to take the plants home later in the year.

Tilden Elementary Ag Week

Sherry Fuhrmann of Tilden Elementary & Pure Wild Tea coordinated with Pennsylvania Co-operative Potato Growers, Inc. & Dieffenbach's Snacks to present information about potatoes and potato chips. Nathan and Bob, along with their side-kicks Spud and Ugly told the students all about the importance of agriculture and supporting local farmers and producers. Pam, Mary, Barbara, Lynn & Dante read The Soil in Jackie's Garden to K-2nd grade & the older kids got to visit the SWAG bus.



34th Annual Pasa Conference

Mary attended the PA Sustainable Agriculture(PASA) Conference and Trade Show in Lancaster, PA. The day was packed with information about sustainable farming practices, market gardening, and the advancements of technology in agriculture.

Dickinson College Farm

Staff joined conservation professionals, and State Officials for a tour of the biogas operation at the Dickinson College Farm to learn about the biodigester equipment and technology used to produce electric.



Q1 HIGHLIGHTS

3rd Annual National Ag Day Lecture and Tour



March 18th was our 3rd Annual National Ag Day & Berks County History lecture and tour as part of America 250 PA, Berks. This year, participants were able to hear historical facts and stories about **Old Dry Road Farm** in Wernersville. Dick Schuster started us off, followed by Heather Yatron. Several members of agricultural and conservation agencies from the Ag Center gave brief introductions to their roles in agriculture. We then rode a school bus to Old Dry Road Farm to tour the buildings and grounds. The Essig & Staudt properties are currently occupied, but we were able to enter and walk around the Dundore-Hottenstein House, as well as various barns and outbuildings. We had a sampling of life in the 18th & 19th centuries. The Hottenstein buildings were relocated from the present-day site of Blue Marsh Lake before the damn was built in 1974, as method of flood control for the surrounding areas. Old Dry Road Farm was set aside as a living-history farm museum to remember those who were displaced as a result of the Blue Marsh Project. The Old Dry Road Farm Complex includes 200 acres of farmland, which are currently farmed. We would encourage you to take a trip to Old Dry Run Farm. More information can be found on their website: www.dryroadfarm.org

OUR WORK IN NUMBERS

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2025 Q1 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.

6,378 GrowTogether
Website Users

11,701 Food Map &
Events Calendar
Views

259 Local Farms &
Vendors Listed
on Food Map

205 Ag Events
Listed

43,300 Facebook
Page Views

41 Facebook
Posts



2025 First Quarter Events

175 Books donated for
National Ag Literacy
Week

50 Participants in National
Ag Day

3,000 Berks County school
children read to during
National Ag Week

100 Marigold seeds planted
with Pre-k students

4 ByGone Berks Recipes
Tried and Posted on
Social Media

2025 OBJECTIVES

First Quarter Update

Our team has continued to make key advances on our annual objectives in 2025.

Continue strengthening the agricultural land preservation program.

- Completed and reviewed the 2025 ACE Program ranking.
- Landscape software:
 - Prepared for the transition of farm stewardship visits scheduling through the Landscape software.

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

- Growing Berks - Ag Study:
 - Continue to present the findings at meeting including the B.A.R.N annual meeting.
 - Align Department activities with the Growing Berks implementation Road Map

Continue to promote the diverse ag career opportunities.

- Joined Commissioner Leinbach and students from Governor Mifflin for a behind the scenes tour of the Farm Show.
- Staff attended the WSC video award presentation to learn about the process and encourage ag processors to host a group of students.

GROWING BERKS and Berks County Department of Agriculture FOCUS AREAS

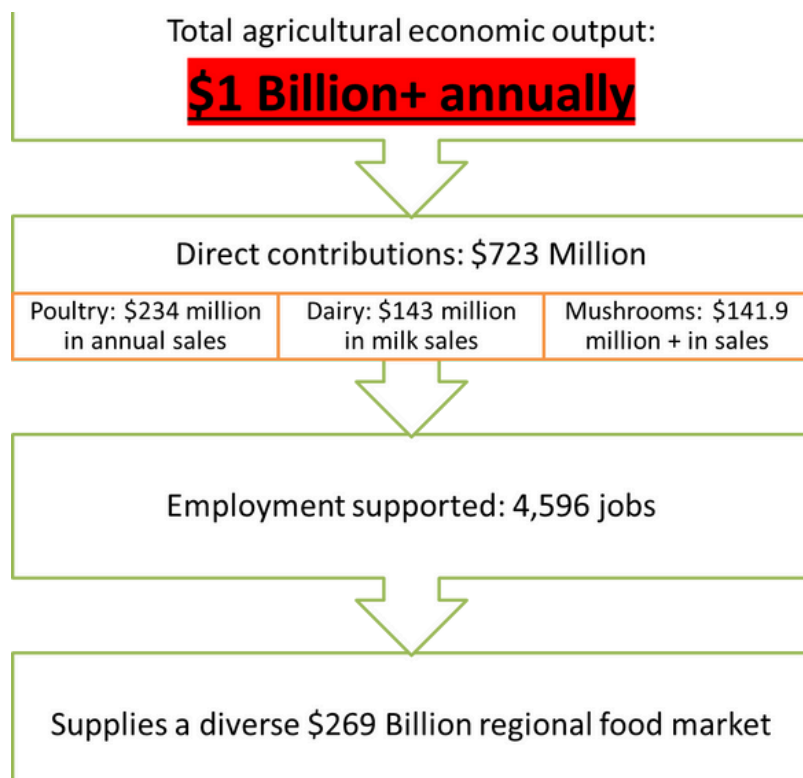
Want to know more?

Don't hesitate to reach out -
we'd love to hear from you.



Growing Berks Quick Facts:

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Average farm size: 118 acres

Farmers average age: 53

Top 3 Commodity sales:

Poultry and Eggs, Milk from Cows, Mushrooms

Broiler production increased 89.4%

Almost 200 acres are in grape production

Horticulture sales are 60% of crop sales

Mushrooms are 93% of horticulture sales

Vegetable acreage decreased and Fruit acreage increased

Greenhouse tomato production increased 4x

Agritourism revenue increased 2x





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

Twin Valley to Farm Field Trip | April 15, 2025

Audience: Culinary Arts students

Description: Twin Valley students will be visiting farms to see food first hand. They will first stop at Weaver's Orchard to see fresh pressed apple cider and learn about orchard operations. After they will be visiting Allegheny Valley Farms for education on dairy cows and yogurt making!

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 in the Classroom | June 25-26, 2025

Audience: Local teachers

Description: Teachers visit and learn where food & fiber comes from first hand! This is a two-day tour of the local agribusinesses industry for educators. This year's course includes visits to Clover Farms, Over Home Alpacas, & Reading Phillies Turf Management.

Partners: BCIU, local agribusinesses

See flyer for more information. [Click to see the video.](#)



June 25-26, 2025 | 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Ag in the Classroom:

Experience the Food & Fiber Industry of Berks County

K-12 Educators are invited on a 2-day bus tour to visit and learn where your food & fiber comes from first hand!

This year's curriculum includes visits to Over Home Alpacas, Clover Farms, Sweet Street Desserts and Reading Phillies Turf Management.

We will explore the scope of agriculture with technology, direct-to-consumer businesses, and niche agricultural products.

**Earn 16 -
Act 48
hours!**



To register, scan the QR code or go to:

<https://www.mylearningplan.com/WebReg/ActivityProfile.asp?D=13543&I=5044245>

Cost: \$100. Includes lunches & transportation.

Registration Deadline is May 23rd!

Questions? Contact Ashley at
agriesemer@berkspa.gov or 610-378-1844 x2548





CONTACT US OR STOP BY!

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