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State Budget Invests in Pennsylvania Agriculture, Environment

By Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams)

This year's state budget invests in Pennsylvania in many ways. As chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, I am particularly pleased with its investment in Pennsylvania's No. 1 industry – agriculture. In fact, this budget creates jobs, promotes tourism and provides much-needed support to our agriculture industry and family farms, which put food on our tables.

This year, as Pennsylvania farmers were attempting to overcome pandemic-related supply chain and labor shortage issues, the Commonwealth's \$7.1 billion poultry industry was hit with an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza or "avian flu." Such outbreaks require the immediate extermination and disposal of entire flocks of affected poultry to prevent the disease from spreading. This comes at a great cost to farmers who, after losing their chickens and the eggs they produce, must then sanitize their barns and wait several weeks before re-populating them.

An outbreak poses a significant blow to farmers and the 26,000 jobs the industry provides. To address this, the 2022-23 state budget invests \$25 million to fight avian flu and provide financial assistance to affected farmers. It also dedicates \$6 million in support for the Animal Health and Diagnostics labs to test for avian flu and allocates \$4 million in additional funding to increase testing capacity at the Penn State and Penn Vet animal laboratories. In addition to avian flu and African swine fever, testing will include other threats to our meat and poultry supplies.

In recent weeks, three bills that I either sponsored, supported or helped usher through my committee made it to the governor's desk and were signed into law. These new laws will have a significant impact on Pennsylvania's agriculture industry and the citizens of this Commonwealth.

Act 91 of 2022 amends the state Motor Vehicle Code to provide safer options for heavy hauling permit holders. To help Pennsylvania farmers here in Adams County and throughout rural Pennsylvania, I successfully amended the bill to permit commercial farm vehicles of a certain size and weight to travel on limited access highways. These vehicles, which may be no wider than 12 feet and are used mainly to apply fertilizers on crops, may travel up to 30 miles on Pennsylvania's limited access highways if they can safely maintain a minimum speed of at least 40 MPH.

Here in Adams County, this new law will enable large spraying operators to use sections of Route 15 and avoid having to travel through small towns like Gettysburg. While enabling our farmers to get their products and spraying equipment from one farm to another, the new law also aims to guard against wear and tear on roadways in local towns and help ensure the safety of other motorists. It takes effect on Sept. 11.

Act 41 of 2022, provides property owners with greater certainty as to what types of maintenance, repairs and improvements require reporting or could otherwise trigger a property assessment adjustment. I amended this legislation to include language from one of my bills, which will enable the movement of municipal boundaries if both municipalities agree on the change.

As a board member of the Pennsylvania Local Government Commission and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, I am aware of many instances whereby a residence, farm or business straddles municipal boundaries. This can result in property owners receiving multiple tax bills

and experiencing other legal and financial headaches. It is particularly challenging when one rural municipality requires water and sewer service and the adjoining one does not.

The Pennsylvania Municipal League asked for legislative relief and my amendment provides it. Now, on mutual agreement, municipalities can avoid the lengthy and costly legal process of moving municipal boundaries.

Act 83 of 2022 aims to protect Pennsylvania's rivers and streams and the Chesapeake Bay by setting clear standards for the labeling and application of fertilizer to turf in residential settings, golf courses and athletic fields. This law does not apply to agricultural applications as those are already governed by state and federal laws and regulations.

Finally, this year's budget supports agriculture with the largest environmental program in a decade, setting aside \$220 million in federal relief funds to establish a clean streams initiative; \$100 million in one-time federal relief and an additional \$56 million in oil and gas lease revenue to support improvements and development of parks and forests. It provides conservation districts an additional \$6.8 million to improve nutrient management, flood control and other conservation-related projects, and \$320 million in federal relief funds for water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure improvement grants.

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