

**PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS**

**INFORMATIONAL MEETING**

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Testimony of Jeff Tkach  
Chief Impact Officer, Rodale Institute

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Pashinski, Chairman Moul, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

First, I want to take a moment to welcome you to Rodale Institute. For 75 years, our Pennsylvania-based global nonprofit has been a leader in groundbreaking research and innovation in organic agriculture. We invest in practical education and workforce development programs, on-the-ground farmer consulting services that touch every farming community in America, and scientific research that improves the long-term viability of agricultural land and the economics of farming.

Additionally, I want to thank the Committee for considering legislation that supports Pennsylvania's organic farmers. The commonwealth's organic agriculture sector greatly benefits Pennsylvania's economy and support from Harrisburg will enable this critical sector to grow even stronger and become a hub for innovation.

**II. RODALE INSTITUTE IS KEY TO PENNSYLVANIA'S BILLION-DOLLAR ORGANIC INDUSTRY**

While the organic market is growing rapidly in the United States, only one percent of American farmland is USDA Certified Organic. In an effort to address this issue in the agriculture sector, Rodale Institute is developing and continuously improving upon its programs that empower all interested farmers—regardless of scale—to respond to market demands and transition to organic production models.

**A. THE SCALE: PENNSYLVANIA RANKS AMONG THE TOP THREE STATES IN THE U.S. FOR ORGANIC PRODUCT SALES**

Data from the United States Department of Agriculture shows demand is growing for the commonwealth's certified organic goods. Figures from the department show sales of products from Pennsylvania's certified organic farms have increased by 48 percent since

2019 and totaled \$1.09 billion in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Additional USDA data shows in 2021, Pennsylvania ranked third in the United States for certified organic sales, falling just behind major producer states such as California and Washington.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Top States: Certified Organic Sales</b>	
	\$ million
California	3,550
Washington	1,140
Pennsylvania	1,094
Texas	572
Oregon	386
New York	328
Wisconsin	313
North Carolina	308
Michigan	272
Colorado	253

## **B. RODALE INSTITUTE GUIDES PENNSYLVANIA'S FARMERS THROUGH THE TRANSITION TO ORGANIC**

The surge in sales of Pennsylvania’s organic goods coincides with the commonwealth’s investment in local farmers who seek to transition to USDA Certified Organic production through an innovative partnership with Rodale Institute and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA). First launched in 2017, the Rodale Institute Organic Consulting Service—with financial support from PDA—has provided free technical on-the-ground assistance to Pennsylvanian farmers transitioning from conventional to certified organic production. Services provided include organic system planning and certification assistance, inspection preparation, fertility recommendations, weed management guidance, and sourcing and supply chain strategy development. The program is in high demand, currently serving at least 93 farmers across the commonwealth. Without the Institute's expert guidance and support from PDA, Pennsylvania’s aspiring organic farmers would likely face increased barriers to a successful transition to USDA organic certification.

The Institute’s education and workforce development programs are also creating a pipeline of American organic farmers skilled in both on-field production practices and business management competencies. These programs are critical to both the commonwealth and the nation more broadly as USDA data shows the average age of an American farm producer is 57 years old. According to the department, the U.S. needs to grow the next generation of farmers “to take on the important business of providing food,

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2022). *Northeastern Region Organic Report*. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/New\\_York/Publications/Latest\\_Releases/2022/Northeast-Region-2021-Organic-Report.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/New_York/Publications/Latest_Releases/2022/Northeast-Region-2021-Organic-Report.pdf)  
<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2022). *NASS Highlights*, Organic Farming: Results From The 2021 Organic Survey [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2022/2022\\_Organic\\_Highlights.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2022/2022_Organic_Highlights.pdf)

feed, fuel, and fiber for a growing population.”<sup>3</sup> With continued investment, Pennsylvania and Rodale Institute can collectively lead the nation in producing expert organic farmers and agricultural business leaders.

### **III. RODALE INSTITUTE IS THE INVENTOR OF “ORGANIC EXCELLENCE”**

Rodale Institute is a proven leader in groundbreaking research designed to uncover the most effective, efficient, and regenerative organic farming practices. Because of that, the Institute applauds Governor Josh Shapiro and the Shapiro Administration’s proposal to create an Organic Center of Excellence in the commonwealth to “grow the state's ability to support this sector of the industry.”<sup>4</sup> Given the Institute's existing research capacity, education programming, direct farmer support programs, infrastructure, and reputation for innovation in the organic agriculture community, Rodale Institute is well positioned to host Pennsylvania’s Organic Center of Excellence.

#### **A. SCIENCE WITH PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR FARMERS**

The main areas of research for the Institute focus on helping farmers successfully transition from conventional to organic farming methods and creating resilient farming systems by mitigating and adapting to the effects of extreme weather events.

The Institute’s landmark research project, the Farming Systems Trial (FST), was launched in 1981 with one clear goal: to address the barriers to the adoption of organic farming. For more than 40 years, the FST has applied real-world practices and rigorous scientific analysis to document the different impacts of organic and conventional grain cropping systems. The scientific data gathered from this research has established that organic management matches or outperforms conventional agriculture in ways that benefit farmers and lays a strong foundation for designing and refining agricultural systems that can improve the long-term viability of farmland. The results also indicate that organic farming systems provide higher crop yields (up to 40 percent higher) than conventional systems during periods of drought or flood, thereby mitigating some of the economic consequences of crop losses during extreme weather events.

Long-term research trials like the FST provide valuable and actionable data for Pennsylvania’s farmers and the nation’s agricultural sector. Further investment in research surrounding organic agriculture is needed to reveal best practices for all producers.

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<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2023). *2022 Census of Agriculture Impacts the Next Generations of Farmers*. <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2023/02/22/2022-census-agriculture-impacts-next-generations-farmers>

<sup>4</sup> The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (2023, March 09).

*Governor Shapiro’s Budget Spurs Innovation, Expands Opportunity, Grows Future Of Pennsylvania Agriculture* [Press release]. [https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/Agriculture\\_details.aspx?newsid=1305](https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/Agriculture_details.aspx?newsid=1305)

#### **IV. INVEST IN STRENGTHENING A PENNSYLVANIA-BASED ORGANIC SUPPLY CHAIN**

Due to Pennsylvania’s status as a top producer of organic goods in the United States, the commonwealth is well positioned to establish a role as a market leader in the USDA Certified Organic supply chain.

##### **A. MARKET DEVELOPMENT AND MARKET INFRASTRUCTURE**

Market demand exists for physical processing facilities (certified organic handlers) for USDA Certified Organic goods. Additionally, a recent USDA report found that while consumer interest in purchasing organic animal products has grown, “the total market share of organically certified animals, as well as of organic forage and feed concentrates, remained low between 2008 and 2019 compared with total herds and acreage. In 2019, organic dairy cows accounted for 3.6 percent of the total dairy herd, and organic corn for grain accounted for 0.4 percent of total corn for grain harvested acreage. By comparison, 9.5 percent of harvested vegetable acres were cultivated organically in 2019 (the most recent year for which complete data are available). To be certified as organic, dairy and beef cattle must eat a diet consisting of certified organic pasture and feed. However, shortages of organic feed are a key impediment to the expansion of organic livestock products.”<sup>5</sup> In its report, the USDA identified possible barriers to growth, including issues such as buyer concentration and challenges with price transparency. Pennsylvania can invest in resolving some of these barriers to create a resilient national organic supply chain centered on the commonwealth and its agricultural infrastructure and markets.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

USDA Certified Organic was born in Pennsylvania and the commonwealth is in a strong position to lead the nation in organic agriculture. With tailored investments in farming communities, workforce development, scientific research, and market development, Pennsylvania can build a strong, resilient, and diversified organic sector that serves as an economic powerhouse for the commonwealth.

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<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2022). Economic Research Service: *Organic Dairy and Beef Producers Face Limited Markets, Feed Grain Shortages*. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2022/november/organic-dairy-and-beef-producers-face-limited-markets-feed-grain-shortages/>