



The Onorato Plan for Agriculture

Growing Pennsylvania's Leading Industry

Agriculture is at the heart of Pennsylvania's rich heritage and as the Commonwealth's largest industry, it is also far more: a fundamental driver of our modern economy, the source of livelihood for millions of the state's residents, and essential to the food security and nutritional well-being of each of the Commonwealth's 12.5 million citizens. As Governor, Dan Onorato will protect and grow this vital sector of Pennsylvania's society and economy.

Agriculture is critical to Pennsylvania's economic growth

Dan Onorato believes that a strong agricultural policy is essential to Pennsylvania's overall financial health. Pennsylvania is fortunate to have 63,163 farms and 7.8 million acres of farmland. The Commonwealth is the third most rural state in the nation – a fact reflected in our overall economy, with 1 in 6 jobs related to agriculture and more international exports from agriculture than any other sector. Every single county in Pennsylvania except one has at least 1,000 acres of farmland, and with \$45 billion in total economic activity the Gross State Product from Pennsylvania agriculture alone nearly equals the entire economic output of Maine.

Pennsylvania's agriculture economy benefits from the expertise of the state's farmers in producing a diverse array of goods and services that are second to none in the nation. Forty percent of the Commonwealth's agriculture comes from the dairy industry – and with over 7,400 dairy farmers producing 1.2 billion gallons of milk – that industry's health is integral to the entire Agricultural Economy. Our mushroom and hardwood production are both first in the United States. And in beef, eggs and so many other products, Pennsylvania's farmers are creating jobs and selling goods that keep the nation fed. With niche and direct market exploration, technologically advanced farming practices, organic farming and agritourism, Pennsylvania farmers continue to be at the cusp of agricultural economic development.

Yet Pennsylvania's farmers are also subject to the same national recession that has hurt so many other working families in the Commonwealth, and they have seen their livelihoods damaged through no fault of their own as the country's economy spiraled downward. Ensuring the financial security of the agricultural sector is essential to Pennsylvania's economic recovery, and providing state-level leadership to help farmers succeed and grow their businesses is a fundamental building block for creating an even stronger economic future for the state.

A vision for Pennsylvania's future

Dan Onorato will pursue state policies that support the growth and development of Pennsylvania farmers by providing them with the tools, support and services they need to grow their businesses. As Governor, Onorato will:

1. Recognize the essential contributions of farmers to Pennsylvania's economy and society by ensuring adequate support for farmers and farming;
2. Increase the profitability of farming to protect and expand its role in the economy;
3. Help farmers benefit from the emerging alternative energy economy; and
4. Provide farmers with the tools and support they need to continue their leadership in addressing environmental concerns.

Through these strategies, Pennsylvania's farmers will be a driving force behind the state's economic expansion.

Ensuring adequate support for farmers and agriculture issues in the state budget and policy-making process

Farmers make an essential contribution to Pennsylvania's economy and society, and the Commonwealth's taxpayers receive an enormous return on investment for every dollar spent on the agricultural sector. As Governor, Dan Onorato will:

- **Restore the significant cuts made to the Department of Agriculture to ensure that it can accomplish its important mission.** Pennsylvania's agriculture budget was cut by 11% this year, sending the Department of Agriculture back six years in its level of state support. As the economy recovers, Dan Onorato will make filling this gap a priority in order to protect the agricultural economy and the well-being of all Pennsylvanians.
- **Create the conditions necessary for farmers to succeed.** In addition to overall financial backing for the Department of Agriculture, Onorato supports a number of targeted investments, statutory changes and state policies to boost the agricultural economy:
 - *Protecting farmers from skyrocketing property taxes.* As Allegheny County Executive, Onorato led the fight against a reassessment that threatened a back-door tax hike on homeowners. As Governor, he will push for a statewide solution that protects homeowners and farmers from onerous property tax increases.
 - *Increasing the resources available in the First Industries Fund.* This program provides grants, loans and loan guarantees to help farmers build their businesses and invest in machinery and equipment upgrades. Onorato will ensure that it has the resources it needs to support the Agricultural Economy's growth.
 - *Ensuring adequate funding for animal health and the Animal Health Commission.* All Pennsylvanians rely on the ability of the state's efforts to protect animal health and to coordinate diagnostic and research functions to quickly identify and remediate any threats to animal health, which can otherwise lead to human health risks in the food supply. With the grand opening of the newest investment in animal health – the BSL3 Lab – in March 2010, providing support to this line in the Department of Agriculture's budget is critical to keeping Pennsylvania at the forefront for animal health and bioterrorism response and surveillance.
 - *Providing leadership on controlling and eradicating plant diseases and pests.* Just as investments in animal health protect Pennsylvanians, so do funding and leadership for research and outreach efforts that can identify threats to plant and

animal life. After 10 years and millions of dollars, and through cooperation between state, federal and local partners, Pennsylvania eradicated plum pox disease. Onorato will continue support for similar efforts with emerald ash borer and invasive species such as feral swine. These efforts ensure public confidence in agricultural production and avoid economic threats to farmers from unforeseen events.

- *Continue to invest in agriculture research.* The Agricultural Research appropriation to Penn State University is a key investment in promoting the economic well-being of Pennsylvania farmers, and Onorato supports its continuation and, if possible, expansion.
- *Preserving confidence in food safety by strengthening food safety laws.* To avoid food-borne illnesses, Onorato supports strengthening the state's food safety laws by standardizing inspections and reporting and by improving enforcement for food safety regulations at restaurants, based on legislation already working its way through the General Assembly. Onorato will also create a single integrated Digital Health Department to give consumers access to food safety reports under the jurisdiction of the state as well as county and local governments. In addition, Onorato will advocate for food safety changes at the federal level that protect Pennsylvania consumers.
- **Protect the viability of family farms as farmers retire.** The average age of a principal farm operator in Pennsylvania is 55 years old, and more than 30% of Pennsylvania farmers are at least 65. Maintaining the rich tradition – and economic necessity – of family farms will require state leadership. Onorato supports:
 - *Continuing the efforts of the Center for Farm Transitions.* This important program provides legacy planning and technical assistance for the next generation of farmers. Onorato will support the Center as well as the machinery and equipment funding programs that are often necessary to promote successful inter-generational farm transitions.
 - *Expanding efforts to attract youth into farming.* Onorato will support the work of 4-H and the FFA. He will also emphasize agricultural education programs beginning in the early grades and including strong Career & Technical Education programs in high schools.
- **Fight hunger while supporting Pennsylvania farms.** Food banks across Pennsylvania are seeing double-digit increases in demand because of the terrible economy, and Onorato will take the following steps to provide relief for struggling families facing food insecurity until the economy recovers:
 - Increase funding for the State Food Purchase Program, which provides direct aid in purchasing food to 1,800 food banks, soup kitchens and supporting agencies;
 - Increase marketing, add more farmers and provide card readers, training and financial support for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, a federal initiative that provides low-income families and older adults access to fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs at local farmers markets; and
 - Restore the Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit, which many farmers use to make contributions to food banks. In addition, Onorato supports a targeted temporary increase in this tax credit to encourage economic recovery.

- **Provide support for Pennsylvania’s 117 county and community fairs.** These fairs attract nearly 6 million visitors each year and require assistance from the state in order to remain viable.

Increasing the profitability of farming to protect and expand its role in the economy

Pennsylvania has a responsibility to its farmers during this national recession as well as a long-term commitment to agricultural economic development as a major component of the state’s overall economic growth plan. As Governor, Dan Onorato will:

- **Recognize the severe problems facing dairy farmers and seek solutions.**
 Pennsylvania’s dairy farms and associated dairy businesses generate more than \$7 billion in economic activity each year and are responsible for over 40,000 jobs. Onorato believes that a threat to the dairy industry is a threat to Pennsylvania’s economy, and he will:
 - *Advocate on behalf of Pennsylvania dairy producers for federal dairy policy that supports their needs.* Onorato understands that the federal government is the primary driver of dairy profitability, and he and his Cabinet members will advocate for appropriate federal support.
 - *Continue and expand the work of the Center for Dairy Excellence and Center for Beef Excellence.* Onorato will focus in particular on increasing the Centers’ business education and management training initiatives in order to help dairy farmers succeed in a changing business environment.
 - *Work with the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board to assist dairy farmers.* Onorato will encourage changes in current practice so that more dairy producers receive the over-order premium on Class I milk.
 - *Encourage the use of risk management tools.* Onorato will increase technical assistance and education to assist farmers in making use of risk management tools, and he will advocate at the federal level for their expansion.
- **Develop local and regional food systems that connect farmers to the marketplace.**
 Onorato will spearhead a regional foodshed development strategy that includes:
 - *Creating a Center for Regional Agricultural Economies in the Department of Agriculture.* The Center will provide leadership and technical analysis to identify foodshed regions where goods can be produced, processed and then procured, and will help farmers connect with and market to small, mid-sized and large purchasers within their region.
 - *Providing financial incentives for schools to buy local farm goods.* In addition to expanding the Farm-to-School Initiative, Onorato will increase the state’s reimbursement rate for schools that buy fresh local farm goods in their foodshed region as part of their breakfast and lunch programs.
 - *Supporting the Pennsylvania Preferred Campaign.* PA Preferred is a successful branding and marketing initiative, and Onorato will support it and seek its enactment into law to ensure its continuation.
- **Support farms that wish to become certified organic.** While still representing a small segment of the market, organic farming has increased dramatically in Pennsylvania and now represents over \$58 million in annual sales and 45,000 production acres. Pennsylvania is one of the top 10 states in the nation for organic farming, which some

farmers have used as a pathway to higher profitability. Onorato will provide technical assistance for farms that are becoming organic.

- **Increase export opportunities for Pennsylvania farmers.** Onorato will provide international business development assistance so that Pennsylvania farmers can better capitalize on export opportunities – where the Commonwealth’s agricultural sector already has a competitive advantage. Onorato will ensure that agricultural exports are a priority for the Department of Community & Economic Development’s Office of International Business Development and that the state is providing leadership to improve coordination among the many organizations and state and federal agencies involved in agricultural export efforts.
- **Provide support for the hardwoods industry.** Onorato will support adequate funding for the Hardwoods Research & Promotion appropriation in the state budget.
- **Encourage agritourism as a strategy for increasing profitability.** Along with agriculture, tourism is Pennsylvania’s top industry – and Onorato will encourage synergies between the two economic drivers. Onorato will:
 - Help agricultural businesses like wineries connect with ecotourism marketing efforts in rural areas and as part of the PA Wilds economic development initiative
 - Strengthen technical assistance and marketing support for small rural businesses that can be part of regional agritourism development strategies
 - Use the Center for Farm Transitions to provide technical and financial support for farmers transitioning into agritourism as part of legacy planning efforts
 - Assist the horse and harness racing industry in marketing and other strategies to attract visitors to racetracks

Helping farmers benefit from the emerging alternative energy economy

Expanding Pennsylvania’s role in “green” alternative energy production is a core component of Dan Onorato’s economic development and job creation strategies. Pennsylvania farmers will play a major role in using the alternative energy economy to spur statewide economic growth. As Governor, Dan Onorato will:

- **Fix the Clean and Green law.** Onorato supports Clean and Green as a strategy for farmland preservation, and he believes that the law can and must simultaneously encourage the use and production of alternative energy. Onorato supports legislation that limits the roll-back of the Clean and Green benefits to those portions of the land that would be used for energy production, as long as the remainder of the farmland is still being preserved.
- **Help farmers drive down their costs while generating alternative energy.** Onorato will spearhead a comprehensive strategy to save farmers money on their utility bills through increased alternative energy production and incentives for conservation. As part of this strategy, Onorato will:
 - *Ensure access to Energy Harvest Grants and solar grants.* Onorato will ensure that farmers have access to adequate grants that assist in implementing alternative energy production, and that the permitting process is efficient in order to protect the environment while enabling projects to move forward.
 - *Support the use of the PAgrows Program for alternative energy development.* Onorato supports this initiative to provide farmers with access to the necessary capital to make alternative energy projects financially feasible.

- *Encourage the development of community digesters to serve small and family farms.* Onorato will provide start-up funds for regional digesters that convert manure to methane gas – protecting the environment while generating energy that is sold to earn money for farmers.
- **Support research on cellulosic ethanol.** Onorato’s Higher Education Policy Paper includes a proposal for a \$25 million state competitive grant pool to serve as a matching fund for federal research grants – with a focus on energy and other emerging sectors of the economy. These resources can help develop strategies for cost-effective conversion of non-food products into ethanol, which if economically competitive, would provide another means of alternative energy production for Pennsylvania farmers.

Providing farmers with the tools and support they need to address environmental concerns

Pennsylvania farmers have long been at the forefront of environmental issues. Dan Onorato will provide the support farmers need so that Pennsylvania can achieve essential goals including clean water while ensuring the economic success of the Commonwealth’s farms. As Governor, Dan Onorato will:

- **Seek additional federal funding and technical assistance in meeting requirements under the federal government’s Chesapeake Bay programs.** Onorato will advocate for clear and predictable expectations for Pennsylvania farmers and adequate federal funding and technical assistance to support their conservation efforts. In addition, Onorato supports maintaining the state as the primary entity for regulation and enforcement of Pennsylvania’s watershed implementation plan as long as the state is meeting its commitments.
- **Increase state funding and tax credits to farmers for implementing conservation practices that help meet federal requirements.** Onorato supports the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) tax credit to provide incentives for best management practices as well as nutrient trading programs that reduce the amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment using market forces to reward farmers who are exceeding the requirements while providing a benefit to entire communities.
- **Preserve additional farmland and open space across Pennsylvania.** Onorato will set a goal of 700,000 acres covered by 2015 – a two-thirds increase – and will support comprehensive land-use planning efforts.
- **Encourage agricultural practices that promote clean water.** Onorato will aim to double the number of acres in Pennsylvania with nutrient management plans, cover crops and no-till planting through the use of technical support and financial incentives. Onorato also supports direct funding for technical assistance to farmers in the design, planning and implementation of conservation practices, including nutrient management.
- **Continue to evaluate the implementation of ACRE.** Onorato will ensure that the Agriculture, Communities & Rural Environment (ACRE) Act continues to effectively balance agricultural, environmental and local land-use interests.

DAN ONORATO: SUPPORTING THE AGRICULTURE ECONOMY IN CREATING AND PRESERVING PENNSYLVANIA JOBS

Dan Onorato will champion the needs and interests of Pennsylvania’s farmers. Onorato’s policies will recognize the contributions of the Commonwealth’s agricultural community to the state’s economy, culture and environmental protection, and he will work hard to ensure that the best days for Pennsylvania farmers always lie ahead.