



Pennsylvania
Department of Agriculture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, May 21, 2026

Contact: Shannon Powers, shpowers@pa.gov, 717.603.2056

**Expanding Career Opportunities for All: Shapiro Administration
Brings Students to Farm City Day at Variety for Accessible
Agriculture Career Exploration and Training**

The Shapiro Administration is committed to creating meaningful career opportunities for all Pennsylvanians, and investing in the skilled, innovative workforce ag employers need to keep Pennsylvania a national leader in the future.

*The **Shapiro Administration** has invested \$62,320 into Variety’s mission to expose students of all abilities to agriculture — funding the creation and expansion of gardens with raised beds, horizontal trellises, wide pathways, lowered potting benches and sink, and other features that make hands-on learning about sustainable agriculture readily accessible to wheelchair- and walker-users.*

Pennsylvania leads the nation in the percentage of farmers under 35 – and under Governor Shapiro’s leadership, the Commonwealth has created more [apprenticeship opportunities and training programs](#) to train young Pennsylvanians who want to work in agriculture.

Worcester, PA – Today, the **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture** and **Variety – The Children’s Charity of the Delaware Valley** hosted students from across southeast and central Pennsylvania for **Farm City Day** to learn how agriculture touches their daily lives and brings their science and technology lessons to life outside the classroom.

Farm City Day is just one example of **Governor Josh Shapiro’s Administration’s** commitment to creating meaningful career opportunities for Pennsylvanians of all ages and abilities, investing in the skilled workforce ag employers need to keep Pennsylvania a national leader in the future. Pennsylvania leads the nation in the percentage of farmers under 35 – and under Governor Shapiro’s leadership, the Commonwealth has created more [apprenticeship opportunities and training programs](#) to train young Pennsylvanians who want to work in agriculture.

“Students here today may be the ones who dream up the technology and innovation that will shape our agriculture industry and feed our families tomorrow,” **Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding** said. “We want students to see, touch, and imagine how they can put their abilities and interests to work in agriculture.

Pennsylvania's agriculture industry needs flexible problem-solvers who can imagine not just how agriculture works for them every day, but how they can have a future making agriculture work better for everyone. Students who have disabilities work daily to navigate the world. They can bring that skill to tackling the challenges a changing climate, technology, and marketplace bring to agriculture."

Since 1935, [Variety Children's Charity of the Delaware Valley](#) has enriched the lives of children and young adults with disabilities through social, educational, and vocational programs that nurture independence and self-confidence, and prepare them for life. The **Shapiro Administration** has supported Variety's mission through **Agriculture and Youth Grants** of \$7,500 each year from 2023 to 2025, funding the creation and expansion of gardens with raised beds, horizontal trellises, wide pathways, lowered potting benches and sink, and other features that make hands-on learning about sustainable agriculture readily accessible to wheelchair- and walker-users.

Additional support through **Urban Agriculture Infrastructure Grants** totaling \$39,820 in 2023, 2024, and [2026](#) has helped Variety enhance and expand their greenhouses, where students get hands-on experience, both growing organic produce to offer the surrounding community at a low cost in their pop-up farm stands, and as ingredients in items they bake in their campus kitchen. Both Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture grant programs supporting Variety are among [PA Farm Bill](#) initiatives to grow a stronger agricultural workforce and future.

"We are honored to partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture for this Farm-City event and in our ongoing efforts to create meaningful opportunities for young people," **Variety CEO Dominique Bernardo said**. "Through accessible vocational training and hands-on learning experiences in our gardens and greenhouses, we are helping students understand the vital role agriculture plays in our communities while preparing them with skills for future careers.

During Farm City Day, students spent their school day exploring Variety's sustainable organic and sensory gardens and greenhouses, and interacting with horses and rabbits, and "milking" a life-size cow simulator. They met people whose jobs make our food healthier and more plentiful and learn how they use worms, compost, chemistry, and trees to make soil and water healthier.

"Every student deserves the chance to explore careers that match their interests, talents, and abilities," said **Labor & Industry Secretary Nancy A. Walker**. "Farm City Day helps students connect classroom learning to real-world opportunities in agriculture, science, technology, and innovation. By creating hands-on, accessible experiences, we're helping young people of all abilities see themselves in careers that will strengthen Pennsylvania's future workforce and shape the future of agriculture."

The **Shapiro Administration** is committed to connecting Pennsylvania students of all interests and abilities to meaningful career opportunities that will be waiting when they finish school. Farm City Day at Variety is the second of two day-long field trips aimed at

exposing students to careers in agriculture, a field that supports one in ten jobs in the state and feeds our economy \$132.5 billion every year.

Since day one, **Governor Josh Shapiro** has supported youth and career training programs in the agriculture industry by:

- Creating [five new apprenticeship programs serving the agriculture industry](#).
- Increasing funding for career and technical education and apprenticeships by nearly **\$65 million** — a 50% increase since the day he took office.
- Calling for a dedicated **\$12.5 million** Workforce and Economic Development Network appropriation, leveraging \$10 million in existing funds and \$2.5 million in new state funds to train additional workers.
- Continuing to fund the **PA Farm Bill** with **\$13.8 million** each year.

Governor Shapiro understands that Pennsylvania's economic success depends on our rural communities and farms. The Shapiro Administration has prioritized long-term agricultural growth and resilience by creating the nation's first **Agricultural Innovation Program** and investing \$20 million to help build the future of American agriculture right here in Pennsylvania. The Shapiro Administration is focused on creating economic opportunity in every community, [creating the first statewide economic development strategy](#) in nearly two decades with agriculture at the forefront.

Ag Innovation Grants are at work funding solutions on 186 farms across Pennsylvania. Applications are under review for the second **\$10 million round** of grants, which has drawn more than 317 applicants requesting a total of \$73 million. The Governor proposed a **\$9 million** increase to the program in his 2026-27 budget proposal, due to incredible demand from farmers.

Governor Shapiro's 2026-27 budget proposal also calls for funding the historic PA Farm Bill for an eighth year. Since taking office, the Governor has invested \$13.8 million each year in the PA Farm Bill, supporting youth education funding and initiatives like [Farm to School Grants](#) and [Agriculture and Youth Grants](#), aimed at helping young people seeking ag careers and ultimately, Pennsylvania ag businesses compete and succeed.

Read more about investments to keep Pennsylvania agriculture competitive and thriving in [Governor Shapiro's 2026-'27 budget proposal](#) and continued support for Pennsylvania farmers at pa.gov/governor.

###