



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Agriculture Secretary Tours Penn State Fruit Research Center to See How Shapiro Administration Agricultural Innovation Grants are Helping Pennsylvania Fruit Growers Innovate and Thrive**

*Pennsylvania's Ag Innovation Grant Program received an overwhelming response in its first year, with more than \$68 million in funding requests for an available \$10 million. A second \$10 million round of grants funded in the Governor's 2025-26 bipartisan budget drew more than 317 applications requesting a total of \$73 million.*

*Governor Josh Shapiro proposed \$19 million in his 2026-27 budget to expand the successful, in-demand program for year three to help Pennsylvania farmers put innovation into practice and continue leading the nation.*

**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, **Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding** toured **Penn State's Fruit Research and Extension Center (FREC)**, where a \$19,000 investment through the nation's first [Agricultural Innovation Grant Program](#) funded a drone-based, precision scanning and spraying system that will help Pennsylvania fruit growers thrive amid challenges like the [catastrophic late-season freezes this spring](#). **Governor Josh Shapiro** proposed a \$19 million investment in his 2026-27 budget to expand the program that is helping Pennsylvania farmers innovate, succeed, and grow their bottom line.

"Cutting-edge research at FREC gives Pennsylvania's top-notch fruit growers tools to address their real-world issues safely, effectively, and efficiently," **Sec. Redding** said. "Helping farmers do what they need to do to compete and continue leading the nation is the reason the **Shapiro Administration** launched Ag Innovation Grants. This investment — combined with millions in state funds backing industry excellence, research and development — is working across Pennsylvania, putting research into practice to help farmers get stuff done."

One of 88 projects funded in the first \$10 million round of Ag Innovation Grants, the state-of-the-art, drone-based precision scanning spraying system is being tested and validated at FREC under real growing conditions. Connecting lab to orchard, the project is creating a proving-ground for how this technology will work for Pennsylvania's growers, and how the innovation will matter to their individual businesses.

The \$19,000 innovation grant project works in concert with the **PSU College of Agricultural Science's Ag Resource Center**, which supports specialty crop applied research. The [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture invested \\$300,000 in the center](#) in early 2026 as one of \$2.2 million in research grants at work feeding growth in the state's powerhouse ag industry.

**PSU College of Agricultural Sciences Associate Professor of Tree Fruit Shanthanu Kumar** demonstrated how the drones work to target spraying where it will be most effective in managing the crops and measuring how effectively it is reaching the targeted areas.

"The Ag Innovation Grant has helped advance our drone research from concept into practical application," said **Kumar**, who is spearheading the project. "We are now developing best management practices for drone use in orchards, including testing optimal spray coverage and application strategies. At the same time, we're seeing strong adoption, with several growers purchasing drones or working with service providers, particularly in areas where traditional equipment cannot easily operate. It's a clear example of how this funding is supporting both innovation and real-world solutions in the field."

"Closing the gap between innovation and adoption requires more than good ideas. It depends on strong research and extension infrastructure to validate technologies, connect them with industry, and build grower confidence, and that is exactly what these investments are strengthening for Pennsylvania agriculture," added **PSU College of Agricultural Sciences Senior Director of Research Initiatives Gretta Tritch Roman**.

### **Investing Together with Science and Industry to Feed Ag Success**

Pennsylvania is one of the nation's leading producers of apples, peaches, grapes, cherries and strawberries, and leads the nation in other plant-based sectors such as forest and nursery products. The Shapiro Administration's investment in FREC is just one example of how Agricultural Innovation grants across the Commonwealth are tools that will give our orchard and farm owners innovative solutions that help them thrive.

Pennsylvania's **Agricultural Innovation Grant Program** received an overwhelming response in year one, with more than \$68 million in funding requests for an available \$10 million. [Eighty-eight projects funded in the first round](#) include technologies now working across the state to improve on-farm and processing efficiency, generate renewable energy while reducing nutrient waste, and support crops and practices that store carbon or replace non-renewable resources.

A **second \$10 million round of grants** funded in the Governor's 2025-26 bipartisan budget drew more than 317 applications requesting a total of \$73 million. Applications are under review now.

Due to this overwhelming response and success, the Governor's 2026-27 proposed budget includes a **\$9 million increase** for the **Agricultural Innovation Grant Program, including \$7 million in base grant funding and \$2 million for a regional biodigester pilot project.**

Under the Shapiro Administration, Pennsylvania has also launched a new [Center for Plant Excellence](#) — also housed at Penn State — to combine forces of industry experts, academic researchers, and public investment to enhance workforce and management practices in Pennsylvania's plant-based ag sectors. The center is one of four centers for excellence [that collectively receive \\$4.1 million through the state budget to fuel growth in Pennsylvania's \\$132.5 billion agriculture industry.](#)

Beyond investing to grow the workforce, innovation, and infrastructure Pennsylvania Agriculture needs, Governor Shapiro has stepped up for the industry in times of need, most recently, [calling on the federal government to expedite disaster assistance for Pennsylvania farmers](#), especially the fruit growers affected by the April freezes.

To support affected growers, **the Governor** also requested an additional \$20 million beyond his 2026-27 budget proposal to the General Assembly. The Shapiro Administration is in conversation with the leadership of the two Agriculture and Rural Affairs committees in the legislature to follow up on the Governor's request.

Since taking office in 2022, **Governor Shapiro** has demonstrated that he understands that Pennsylvania's economic success depends on our rural communities and farms. Pennsylvania agriculture supports **over 48,800 farms, nearly 600,000 jobs, and contributes \$132.5 billion annually** to the Commonwealth's economy.

Agriculture is one of the cornerstones of **Governor Shapiro's Economic Development Strategy** — Pennsylvania's first in two decades — and the Shapiro Administration is committed to investing in its continued growth.

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](http://pa.gov/governor).

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