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Shapiro Administration Honors Huntingdon County Military Veteran-Farmer, Inaugural Pennsylvania Veteran Ag Entrepreneurship Award Winner

Tyrone, PA – Today, **Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding** and **Deputy Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Terrance Koudelka, Pennsylvania Air National Guard**, visited **George Lake**, owner of **Thistle Creek Farms** in Huntingdon County, who was honored at the 2026 Pennsylvania Farm Show as the inaugural winner of the Pennsylvania **Veteran Ag Entrepreneurship Award**. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture recognizes military veteran-farmers through the new award for their leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurial success.

“Veterans who continue to serve their country through agriculture play an important role in preserving Pennsylvania’s agricultural legacy and strengthening its future,” **Secretary Redding** said. “Veterans like George Lake bring the same dedication, discipline, resilience, and problem-solving skills that defined their military service to their farms and communities. Their contributions make Pennsylvania agriculture stronger, and the **Shapiro Administration** recognizes the important role veteran farm families play in our industry. We remain committed to investing in these farmers, supporting the success, and ensuring they have opportunities to continue building their legacies.”

A 30-year U.S. Marine Corps veteran, Lake has transformed his family’s 600-acre Huntingdon County farm, operated since 1919, into a nationally recognized regenerative livestock operation producing a premium grass-fed beef brand. Beyond managing a diversified farm, he mentors fellow producers. Lake exemplifies the award’s mission by combining military leadership, agricultural innovation, and long-term business sustainability to strengthen Pennsylvania agriculture.

"It is a real privilege to recognize George Lake for his dedicated service to our nation and his continued dedication to agriculture in Pennsylvania,” said **Adjutant General and Head of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Maj. Gen. John Pippy.** “The National Guard, and the Armed Forces as a whole, have always relied on the strength of our agricultural communities. Food security is national security, and

veterans like George, who apply the discipline, resilience, and leadership skills they learned in the military to farming, are critical to ensuring our nation's future."

“I think small farms are the backbone of American agriculture, and I’m willing to give in any way that I can to help small farmers succeed,” **Lake** said. “Helping other farms be profitable has become a bit of a passion for me. I’m especially drawn to veterans who want to enter a farming career. I’m aware of how much they were willing to give for our country.”

The **PA Veteran Ag Entrepreneurship Award** honors a military veteran who owns an agricultural business and demonstrates innovation, diversification, and business growth, while showing strong leadership and service within the veteran and local communities. Awardees are recognized for responsible stewardship through conservation-minded and climate-smart practices, as well as for creating local jobs and strengthening regional food systems. The award also highlights businesses that align with the **Agriculture Business Development Center’s** priorities, including sound financial planning, risk management, and long-term viability.

Sec. Redding and Maj. Gen. Pippy also invited nominations for the next round of submissions beginning this Wednesday through Dec. 13, 2027. The award ceremony for the next honoree will be held Jan. 14, 2027, at the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

The Shapiro Administration supports veteran farmers through the **Homegrown by Heroes** program, in collaboration with the **Farmer Veteran Coalition** and the **PAPreferred®** program. Homegrown by Heroes helps farmer-veterans sell their locally grown products and connects consumers to a tangible way to support veteran-owned farms.

Pennsylvania’s Agriculture Sector is the Backbone of the Commonwealth

With more than 48,800 farms contributing over $153.2 billion a year to the economy and supporting nearly 600,000 jobs in Pennsylvania, agriculture is foundational to the Commonwealth’s heritage and future. **Governor Shapiro** has prioritized strengthening both agriculture and food security — helping farmers, families, and communities thrive.

Last month, the Governor unveiled Pennsylvania’s **first-ever, 10-year Strategic Plan for Agriculture.** The ten-year plan outlines the necessary steps to address four critical industry needs including access to capital, efficiency and profitability, modernization and innovation, and public engagement. Through this plan, the Shapiro Administration is working to support farmers and ag producers and build a stronger, more competitive, and more connected agriculture industry.

The 2026-2027 bipartisan budget Governor Shapiro signed earlier this year continues this work by:

- Maintaining $10 million for the Agricultural Innovation Grant Program to continue driving innovation in Pennsylvania agriculture.

- Continuing $13.8 million in funding to fully fund the Pennsylvania Farm Bill to support business planning, infrastructure, and workforce development.
- Increasing the cap for capital development projects, which includes agricultural projects, in the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA) program from $200,000 to potentially up to $2 million.
- Directing funding to the Agricultural Business Development Center and the Centers of Plant, Beef, Poultry & Livestock, and Dairy Excellence to support farmers and producers with resources and services that enhance the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania farms.
- Sustaining funding for the nation's leading farmland preservation program, protecting 6,781 farms and 671,082 acres in 58 counties from future development.

The Shapiro Administration highlighted $165 million in investments to strengthen Pennsylvania's animal diagnostic laboratory network, including expansions at Penn State's Animal Diagnostic Laboratory ($65 million), a new PennVet laboratory ($94 million), and supporting the new Keystone Animal Diagnostic Center at Penn State Beaver ($6 million).

Find Pennsylvania's **Strategic Plan for Agriculture** here and learn more about Governor Shapiro's support for Pennsylvania farmers and nation-leading agriculture industry here.

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