

Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, USDA Farm to Food Bank Funds Support Local Dairies, Workforce, Food Banks

Secretary of Agriculture highlights \$20 million CARES Act support and relief for Pennsylvania's dairy farmers

Mercer, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding visited the Ralph Moore Dairy Farm in Mercer today, one of more than 30 Pennsylvania dairy farms supported by the state's acquisition of more than 200,000 pounds of Swiss cheese – stranded from COVID-19 supply chain disruptions – to distribute through Pennsylvania's charitable food system with funds from the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) and the state's [Farm to Food Bank award](#).

On the farm, Secretary Redding highlighted more than \$20 million available in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to Pennsylvania's dairy farmers, [announced yesterday by Governor Tom Wolf](#), following months of uncertainty and loss from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Two million pounds of Swiss cheese stranded without a market is the perfect example of the uncertainty Pennsylvania dairy has faced since COVID-19 arrived in Pennsylvania. ‘Just donate it to the food banks’ is the common response, but what does the dairy farmer and processor get in return?” said Secretary Redding. “We were blessed to be able to acquire some of this cheese and distribute it to those in need, and also open up \$20 million, thanks to CARES Act funding, to help our dairy farm families recover a little of what's been lost.”

The Ralph Moore Dairy Farm is one of more than 30 Pennsylvania dairy farms supported by the state's acquisition of 202,000 pounds of Swiss cheese. In total, \$476,842 was used to source more than 100,000 packages of cheese that will be distributed to those in need across the state through the 13 food banks participating in the PASS program.

The cheese, produced by Fairview Swiss Cheese in Fredonia, was left without a market due to food supply chain disruptions as a result of COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Through PASS, the department acquired the cheese and contracted with Laubscher Cheese Company in Mercer to slice and package it in consumer-sized packaging. In addition to providing support to Fairview Swiss Cheese and area dairy farms, this initiative allowed Laubscher Cheese Company to bring ten furloughed employees back to work to slice, package, and distribute the product.

“Feeding Pennsylvania is grateful for our strong partnerships with our generous agriculture community,” said Jane Clements-Smith, executive director of Feeding Pennsylvania. “Over the last five years, the PASS program has allowed our member food banks to distribute more than 12 million pounds of nutritious Pennsylvania products across the commonwealth, and we welcome the expansion of the PASS program to provide even more opportunities for farmers and processors to partner with the charitable food network to ensure that no one in Pennsylvania is denied access to nutritious food.”

The \$20 million in dairy support is through two programs: the Pennsylvania COVID-19 Dairy Indemnity Program, funded at \$15 million and a \$5 million dairy-only PASS program to secure

surplus dairy products for distribution through the commonwealth's charitable food system. Both programs are federally funded through the CARES Act.

Any dairy farm that experienced financial losses due to discarded or displaced milk during the COVID-19 emergency disaster may apply for assistance. Each farm with a documented loss will receive a minimum of \$1,500 and an additional prorated share of the remaining funds, not to exceed the actual amount assessed by the handler. The deadline to [apply](#) for the Dairy Indemnity Program is September 30, 2020.

The department's [Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System \(PASS\)](#) program helps to support Pennsylvania's agriculture industry in all 67 counties and reduce waste of agricultural surplus by making connections between production agriculture and the non-profit sector. Originally enacted into law in 2010, the program was first funded in 2015 by Governor Wolf at \$1 million annually. This year, the program was funded at \$1.5 million through the state's 2020-21 budget. In addition to the \$1.5 million in state funds, the program has been awarded an additional \$10 million – \$5 million for dairy-only purchases – with funds from the state's federal CARES allocation.

For information as it relates to agriculture during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania visit agriculture.pa.gov/COVID. For the most accurate, timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit on.pa.gov/coronavirus