

**Testimony Offered for
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Transportation and Policy Committees**

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Good afternoon. My name is Carl Shaffer, President of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, representing the interests of over 47,000 rural and farm family members. We are very pleased to have this opportunity to briefly address the members of the House Transportation Committee and the House Democrat and Republican Policy Committees.

As the leading industry in the state, agriculture and related businesses serve as the foundation of Pennsylvania's economy, generating more than \$4.3 billion in cash receipts and \$44 billion in total economic impact. Pennsylvania's agricultural products are consumed not only within the Commonwealth, but across the nation and around the globe.

As one might imagine, a safe and efficient transportation system is the key to this thriving industry. Without such a system, typical agricultural tasks like planting, harvesting and transporting products to market would be difficult, if not impossible. A strong and reliable transportation infrastructure is key to farmers and agribusiness being able to transport and receive products in a cost-efficient manner.

While PennDot and local townships have done their best to stretch transportation dollars, our farmers and their suppliers are increasingly finding road and bridge conditions to be inadequate – and often impassible. This is an intolerable position for farmers. In fact, farmers and agribusiness entities such as milk haulers, must often detour around roads and bridges that cannot accommodate their equipment. Whether it is a weight limit, narrow lanes, poor road conditions or unsafe bridges, the deteriorating state of Pennsylvania's infrastructure is causing farmers to waste time and fuel as they must use alternate routes.

Consider the subject of bridges alone. According to the recent Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Study, with 5,646 structurally deficient (SD) bridges, Pennsylvania ranks first in the nation for total number of SD bridges and second for the total deck area. Fifty-seven

percent of state bridges are more than 40 years old, giving Pennsylvania the fourth-oldest bridge inventory in the nation.

With more than 58,000 farm families and countless more agribusiness entities in Pennsylvania, bridges – particularly those in rural areas – are a critical element of farming enterprises. As state dollars provided to local governments for transportation needs are reduced, roads and bridges fall deeper into disrepair, which then requires local governments to reduce weight limits in an effort to preserve what remains of the crippled transportation infrastructure. Farmers in rural areas often have limited access to their operations, and a single bridge out of commission may mean that a milk truck cannot pick up a load of milk.

Problems caused as a result of a crumbling transportation infrastructure are becoming more and more frequent within the farm community. They have risen to such significance within the membership of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, that policy has been developed addressing these concerns. Our organization recommends that all monies in the motor license fund received from fuel taxes, registration of vehicles, licenses and other taxes be used solely for the improvement of the highway system. In doing so, this would provide a dedicated funding mechanism for the highway system. We also support increased allocations for the Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program. Realizing the daunting financial challenges facing transportation, Farm Bureau will be continually evaluating policy concerning funding sources.

Farm Bureau understands that solving this problem will not be easy – especially with over 40,000 miles of state-maintained roads, and an addition more than 77,000 miles of roads maintained by local governments. We are not offering these remarks to cast blame for the current situation. We are here, however, to help address this problem, and ask that we find common sense ways to improve the state's transportation infrastructure. Tight budgets make this

task an even greater challenge, but in order to sustain economic growth and keep agriculture growing, we need a dedicated funding source for roads and bridges, particularly in rural areas.

While our members' policy has and continues to oppose the tolling of I-80 and other federally funded highways, and the privatization of our road systems including the Pennsylvania Turnpike, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau can support a balanced approach in securing funding for the Commonwealth's roads and bridges. A balanced approach would include funding mechanisms that spread the financial burden to all who benefit from our state's highway system rather than methods that impact specific users and regions of the state such as tolling I-80. Broader and more balanced approaches of raising revenues that Farm Bureau could support include an increased commitment of general fund revenues, issuance of additional state bonds, increases in motor fuel taxes and other practical funding sources such as vehicle registration and license fees to be used solely for the improvement of the highway system. Maintenance of highways, roads and bridges should be given priority over new construction, especially rural state roads.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is willing to help find a solution, and we hope we can have a seat at the table as a funding plan is created. Thank you again for this opportunity to share the perspective of our members on this vital issue for agriculture and rural Pennsylvanians.