

## **Testimony: Rural Roads, Infrastructure, and Agricultural Mobility**

*Vice President, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau*

*Hearing on Rural Infrastructure and Transportation Safety*

Chairwoman Ward, members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Tommy Nagle, and I serve as Vice President of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, which represents over 27,000 farm and rural families across the Commonwealth.

First, I want to thank this committee and the Senate for drafting and advancing Senate Bill 481. This bill recognizes the experience and judgment of professional milk haulers by allowing them to determine when it is safe to transport milk, even during travel restrictions caused by inclement weather. It's a strong example of commonsense legislation that supports agricultural operations, and we are hopeful it will be signed into law soon.

Pennsylvania has more rural roads than any other state in the country. While that fact reflects our agricultural strength and deep rural roots, it also presents a critical responsibility—ensuring that those roads remain safe, accessible, and functional for the farmers who rely on them every day.

Each spring, our farmers begin moving equipment, often large, slow-moving, and oversized—along these rural routes. It's during this time that we see an increase in accidents involving farm machinery. That's why in 2000, we created the Rural Roads Safety Program, and each year we join with state agencies and the Pennsylvania State Police for Rural Roads Safety Week. Our goal is simple: save lives by improving awareness and safety.

But education only goes so far without action. Farmers continue to face aging bridges, narrow roads, eroded shoulders, and inconsistent weight limit enforcement

that disrupt both farm operations and public safety. Agriculture is one of Pennsylvania's leading industries, contributing over \$130 billion to the state's economy each year. Ensuring that rural infrastructure can support the needs of farmers is not only critical to their daily operations, but to the broader economic health of our state.

We're asking for your support in three key areas:

- **Prioritizing Maintenance Over New Construction**

Too often, new infrastructure projects take priority over maintaining the roads that already serve our rural communities. We strongly believe the state must prioritize the repair of rural roads and culverts, not just for day-to-day operations but for emergency response, equipment access, and economic continuity in agriculture.

- **Building Roads for the Equipment That Uses Them**

The size and scale of modern farm equipment have changed dramatically over the years, but the roads they rely on often have not. Many new road features—such as guide rails, roundabouts, and temporary detours during construction—are not built with agriculture in mind. This creates dangerous situations when tractors or trailers are forced into tight spaces or must travel on unsuitable routes. We need infrastructure that matches the needs of rural users, including roads and intersections designed with farm equipment in mind. Permitting processes and rules around oversized loads must also reflect the fact that farmers are often moving their own products, not commercial freight, and should be treated accordingly under transportation regulations.

- **Respecting Rural Road Realities in Regulation**

Farmers understand the importance of public safety, and they take pride in being responsible users of rural infrastructure. However, we continue to face regulatory decisions that overlook how rural roads are actually used. When local governments lower weight limits on roads without justification, it can block essential access to fields and markets. Private railroad crossings used primarily for agriculture are sometimes subjected to unreasonable fees and requirements, even though they serve a single property. Additionally, when a farmer's equipment is damaged by overhanging limbs or when they have to use the shoulder to allow cars to pass safely, liability concerns often fall unfairly on the farmer. We are asking for policies that acknowledge these rural realities—not to exempt agriculture from responsibility, but to make sure the rules we follow are fair, practical, and grounded in how these roads are truly used.

I want to thank this committee for your continued attention to the infrastructure and regulatory challenges facing Pennsylvania's farmers. Your work makes a difference—not just for agriculture, but for every community that relies on a strong, resilient rural economy. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.