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Secretary of Agriculture, State Veterinarian: Pennsylvania's \$34.6 Billion Animal Ag Industry Relies on Quick, Coordinated Emergency Declaration and Response

Harrisburg, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and State Veterinarian Dr. Kevin Brightbill today discussed a variety of dangerous transmissible animal diseases that threaten Pennsylvania's \$34.6 billion animal agriculture industry. Should these diseases – which are currently present in other countries – arise anywhere in the United States, Pennsylvania would need to immediately declare a state of emergency to support the industry.

"Pennsylvania's animal agriculture industry is worth billions to our economy but could be taken out in a heartbeat with one animal health pandemic like we're experiencing today with COVID-19," said Redding. "Inserting politics into emergency response, like is proposed with the constitutional amendments on the ballot, will slow response time and put critical resources and cross-agency collaboration out of reach for the industry we all rely on."

High Path Avian Influenza (HPAI) and African Swine Fever (ASF) are just two of many potential threats to Pennsylvania's animal agriculture industry. ASF is currently sweeping through China. In 2018, they lost 50 percent of their hog population but after an exceptionally cold winter the disease slowed. However, in 2021 they saw a fresh wave of ASF and have again lost 20-30 percent of their remaining population. Should either of these diseases be identified in the United States, it would be critical for an emergency to be declared in the commonwealth so that immediate cross-agency collaboration could begin, and federal funding enhanced.

"Every state in the U.S. has agreed to immediately place a 72-hour hold on transportation of hogs in and out of their state in the instance of African Swine Fever being identified in any of our states," said Dr. Brightbill. "Placing checkpoints at our borders and at strategic locations within the state to monitor movement, in coordination with the Pennsylvania State Police or even the National Guard, may need implemented immediately with help from an Emergency Declaration."

In 2014, an outbreak of HPAI in the United States led to the infection and loss of more than 50 million birds with estimated losses of \$1.6 billion and economic losses of \$3.3 billion. Pennsylvania's poultry industry supports more than 26,000 jobs and 69 out of every 100 poultry or egg products are produced locally.

On the election ballot in May are two proposed constitutional amendments that could hinder the ability of Pennsylvania's executive branch to make quick, coordinated actions to respond to an animal health emergency and protect those who work in and rely on the products from this multi-billion-dollar industry. The ability for the industry to overcome the challenges of the future would be at risk.

Representative Steve Malagari, who represents a multitude of Pennsylvania's large meat processors including Clemens Food Group, Marcho Farms, Godshalls Quality Meats and JBS USA, joined Secretary Redding in his plea for Pennsylvanians to consider future emergency response scenarios when voting.

"Being able to respond to and recover from disasters quickly and effectively is imperative for our state to be able to protect livestock and people. Not only does our state rely on food and animal processing as a huge economic driver, we all need stability in our food supply chain," said Representative Steve Malagari. "Hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians depend on this industry, including farmers, hospitality workers, and other businesses. When disasters arise, decisions must be made quickly to respond effectively, allocate resources, and keep people safe. In times like that, there is no time to debate how to respond, however difficult those decisions might be."