



Growing Berks: Agriculture's Economic Impact and A Roadmap for Its Future

Vision

Berks County is a place where agricultural production and agri-business is thriving, the community engages with and supports local agricultural producers, and the industry is well understood and valued by municipal, county, and regional decision-makers.

Growing Berks Data Highlights

Average farm size: 118 acres

Top 3 Commodity sales:

Poultry and Eggs, Milk from Cows, Mushrooms

Farm labor is 20% of expenses

Farmers average age: 53

Agritourism revenue increased 2x between 2017 and 2022

Growing Berks Data Highlights

Horticulture sales are 60% of crop sales

Mushrooms are 93% of horticulture sales

Greenhouse tomato production increased 4x

Vegetable acreage decreased and Fruit acreage increased

Almost 200 acres are in grape production

Broiler production increased 89.4%

POULTRY



Poultry production is the largest and fastest growing sector

\$234
million

HORTICULTURE AND PRODUCE



Fruit, vegetable, (including mushroom) production

\$150+
million

MILK/DAIRY



Dairy Farming remains a cornerstone of the Ag economy

\$143
million

GRAIN AND HAY



Grain and hay utilize the largest amount of farmland

\$70.6
million

AGRITOURISM



Agritourism is increasing as an alternate source of income and supports sales of new Ag products

\$39
million

SWINE



Swine markets provide additional diversity to the agriculture ecosystem of Berks County

\$34.6
million

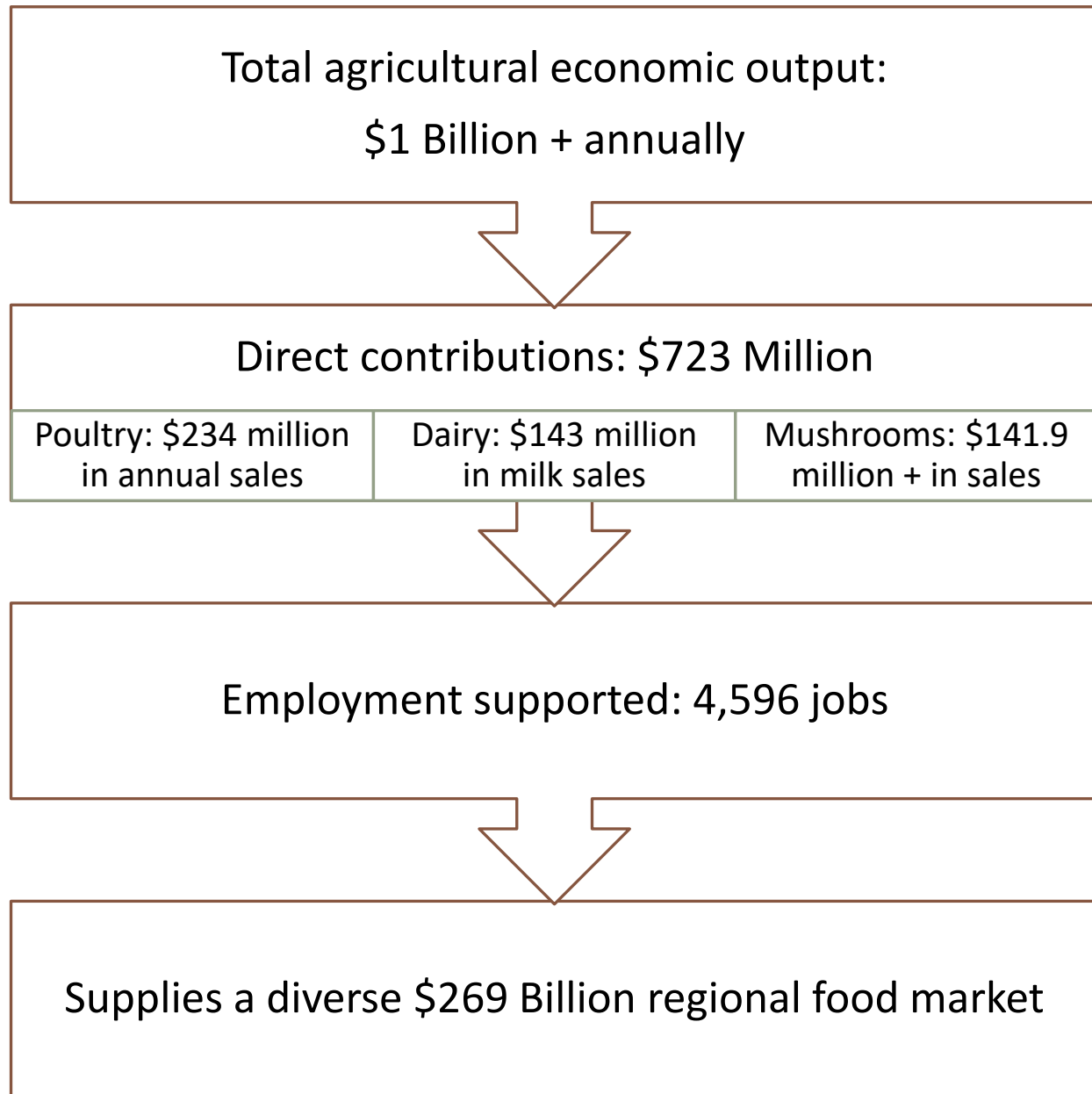
CATTLE MARKET



Dairy is transitioning to beef with sales of

\$33.1
million

Agriculture's Economic Impact



Built on Stakeholder Input



Stakeholder input in the plan was gathered from nearly 100 interviews and five focus groups held during the winter and spring of 2024. An Ag Study Advisory Committee held 4 meetings to review data, recommendations and Action steps.



Farmers

Better access to markets, financial support, and workforce development programs.



Local governments

Balancing agricultural land preservation with economic growth.



Economic development organizations

Potential for value-added agriculture, farm expansion, and diversification to drive economic growth.



Community members

Strong support for farmland preservation and sustainable farming practices.

Alignment with



Economic Development

Emphasizing agriculture as a vital economic driver and prioritizing investment in value-added agriculture to enhance farm revenues and diversify income streams.



Workforce and Career Pathways

Addressing labor challenges by fostering education and training programs for agricultural skills.



Entrepreneurship and Agri-Business Development

Encouraging agribusiness entrepreneurship and innovation to create new opportunities within the agricultural sector.



Land Use and Land Security

Focusing on agriculture sustainability by preserving farmland through agricultural conservation easements and promoting SMART Growth principles and redevelopment.



Market Development

Expanding access and connections to regional markets and leveraging our location to support and attract agri-business related companies.



Collaboration Leveraging collaborative and cooperative relationships and partners to provide resources, expertise, and funding for agricultural initiatives and activity.



Technology and the Farm:

Advocating for infrastructure that supports the use of agricultural connectivity and supports increasing mechanization and technology.

GROWING BERKS FOCUS AREAS

- Land Use and Land Security
- Workforce and Career Pathways
- Entrepreneurship and Agri-Business Development
- Technology and the Farm
- Market Development
- Agriculture Finance



OUR GOALS

1

PROMOTE
agriculture and the agriculture industry as a vital piece of the Berks County economy.

2

EXPAND
local knowledge of agriculture practices and the importance of preservation.

3

INCREASE
business management education for farm transitions.

4

FOSTER
agribusiness entrepreneurship.

5

ENCOURAGE
adoption of innovation and technology.

6

ENHANCE
marketing outreach to support expanding market opportunities and value-added products.

7

SUPPORT
agriculture and the financing options for infrastructure, market growth, and physical expansion and improvements.

8

LEVERAGE
public-private partnerships to expand access to resources, expertise, and capabilities.

Roadmap for the Future

- Land Use and Land Security
- Workforce and Career Pathways
- Entrepreneurship and Agri-Business Development
- Technology and the Farm
- Market Development
- Agriculture Finance

Land Use and Land Security

Recommendations:

L1. Update existing farmland protection programs that exhibit and reflect continued support for agriculture preservation

L2. Expand training opportunities for and outreach to municipal officials that raises awareness and understanding of agriculture, on-farm value-added uses, and ag accessory uses.

L3. Support transportation corridor planning to improve rural public transportation and design standards to support safer integration of farm and non-farm traffic.

Workforce and Career Pathways

Recommendations:

- W1. Expand knowledge and awareness of career pathways in Agriculture and its related fields.
- W2. Seek formal agribusiness representation on CTC, secondary education, and engineering college advisory boards
- W3. Encourage programs and activities that address labor force needs across industries to include Agriculture.

Entrepreneurship and Agri-Business Development

Recommendations:

E1. Identify and expand training opportunities specifically for agricultural entrepreneurship and business needs.

E2. Create and support communication pathways to showcase and promote Ag activities and events for those interested in farming and Agribusiness entrepreneurs.

E3. Compile, assess, and promote agricultural resources and existing education programs offered by partners on various topics that support Agri-business development and new ideas.

Technology and the Farm

Recommendations

- T1. Create a convenient access point and support framework for information on emerging technology and best practice applications of such technology.
- T2. Support technology infrastructure and access that aligns with the needs of farmers and Agri-business.

Market Development

Recommendations:

M1. Support farm markets, stands, direct to market producers, and growers with marketing and brand awareness of local products.

M2. Identify and expand local and regional market opportunities for Berks County farmers and producers who want to expand to include value-added products.

M3. Attract businesses to Berks County and the region that support and enhance existing farm activity and production and supports market resiliency and business security.

Agriculture Finance

Recommendations:

F1. Increase awareness of and access to financing resources.

F2. Support and identify financial education programs and resources for new and beginning farmers and farm transitions.

Implementation

- **Advocate** farmland preservation guidelines that meet the demands of farms, and agriculture to that support farm expansions and diversification.
- **Support** policies that allow for expansion of value-added agriculture and create financial incentives.
- **Promote** infrastructure investments that improve transportation, logistics and connectivity for increased market access.
- **Strengthen** agricultural, education and workforce development programs.
- **Build** partnerships among governments, farmers, educators, and businesses to support farms and agri-business.
- **Enhance** access to resources for agricultural entrepreneurship especially for new and beginning farmers.
- **Champion** marketing campaigns that highlight the importance of local agriculture and promote Berks County products locally and regionally.

Next Steps



The Roadmap outlines Leads, Partners and Actions.



Identified Partners have been contacted to ensure that the Action Steps align with their organization's goals and activities.



Working with the Partners, Leads for the Focus Areas will map out timelines and put additional detail to the Actions.



The Land Use and Land Security focus area will continue to be built out as we gather additional empirical data on Agriculture land use and classifications.

Plan Adoption

Board of Commissioners
Thursday, February 6, 2025