



## **Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) Meeting Meeting Minutes | December 11, 2025 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

DEP Southcentral Regional Office, Susquehanna Rooms A/B and Microsoft Teams

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### **Welcome & Introductions – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

Bob Haines conducted a roll call of AAB members; 8 of the 10 voting members were present. A quorum was established.

#### **Members present:**

Chair Jennifer Reed-Harry.....	PennAg Industries Assoc.
Vice-chair Grant Gulibon.....	PA Farm Bureau
Lynn Dietrich.....	PA State Grange
Matt Royer.....	Penn State University
Nathan Clark.....	Rep. Dan Moul
Destiny Zeiders.....	Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski
Lily Ott.....	Sen. Elder Vogel Jr.
Bill Evans.....	Sen. Judith Schwank
Jill Whitcomb*.....	PA Dept. of Environmental Protection
Greg Hostetter*.....	PA Dept. of Agriculture
Pete Vanderstappen (in for Tim Peters*) .....	USDA, NRCS

#### **Members absent:**

Amy Brown.....	PACD
Christopher Uhland.....	Ornamental Horticulture
James Gillis*.....	USDA, Farm Agency Service

*\*Non-Voting Member*

### **Review & Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (Action) – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

The August 28, 2025 meeting minutes were approved with a correction to the roll call. Nathan Clark was counted for purposes of quorum but had not yet been formally appointed to the Board, and Amy Brown was present but was inadvertently omitted from the roll call. A quorum was nonetheless established. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Destiny Zeiders and seconded by Grant Gulibon. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Legislative Update – Bill Evans and Nathan Clark**

Destiny Zeiders informed the Board that the House session is scheduled to begin next Tuesday (December 16, 2025) with two days of voting planned.

Nathan Clark did not have any additional updates other than what was already mentioned.

Lily Ott informed the Board that the Senate's session just ended and the first full week of session for 2026 is scheduled for January 26-28, 2026.

Bill Evans did not have any additional updates.

### **Public Comment – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

No public comments.

### **PA Permit Fast Track Program Overview (Requested) – Ryan Kostival and Katie McLaughlin, Office of Transformation and Opportunity, Office of the Governor**

Ryan provided the Board with an overview of the PA Permit Fast Track Program. The presentation included background on Executive Order 2024-04, which established the program, as well as information on program entry and the Coordinated Planning Process. Katie shared current program statistics and highlighted an agricultural project currently in the program—the Martinsburg Community Manure Digester Project. Ryan and Katie addressed questions and comments from the Board following the presentation.

Jennifer Reed Harry asked about the Martinsburg project and how it is planned to ensure consistent material for the digester to work properly since, this will be a hub digester receiving manure from different farms in a ten-mile radius. Jennifer also asked about traffic concern on roads in and around the digester.

Jennifer also raised the concern about data centers being built on prime farmland and asked how the Governor's Office of Transformation and Opportunity (OTO) plan to address that issue.

Katie noted that Pennsylvania's rate of farmland conversion is approximately double the national average, presenting a significant challenge. Katie stated that the (Ag) strategic plan includes goals focused on realistically slowing this conversion through incentives, while acknowledging that solutions are not yet fully defined. Katie continued that the need for task forces and collaboration with industry partners to determine how best to address the issue and protect prime farmland was emphasized, recognizing that implementation will require involvement from appropriate decision-makers.

Jill raised awareness of the topic and expressed hope that lessons learned from the Denmark tour, which Katie attended, are being applied to the Martinsburg project.

Katie responded that the Martinsburg project is unique, including collaboration with European partners on an Italian-led project. The scale and farm size are comparable to what was observed in

Denmark, and the project incorporates similar transportation and operational principles. Martinsburg was selected in part due to truck traffic considerations, and it was noted that this type of project is relatively new to the U.S., meaning there will be significant learning opportunities as the project progresses.

Jill expressed appreciation for the effort on strengthening inter-agency coordination in the Ag Strategic Plan, citing the multi-agency Ag Permitting Roundtable and its work on permitting efficiencies. Jill emphasized the importance of maintaining open communication moving forward.

Pete Vanderstappen commented that a community digester project in Indiana maintains consistent input material by recycling manure bedding material from the digester back to the participating farms.

Ryan thanked Pete for his comment and informed the Board that OTO would be happy to comeback with more specific details of the operation once the project is up and running.

Nate Clark requested a discussion with the Board focused on the Martinsburg project to address outstanding concerns. Nate asked about the origin of the theme callouts in the Ag Strategic Plan, noting that they were not part of presentations to the committees' executive directors.

Katie replied that the callouts in the presentation are high-level themes of the plan and not specific language of the plan.

Nate asked if the themes were from the regional meetings and Katie replied that the themes were from the regional meetings, data collection, and the work groups, but is more ag focused for this presentation. Katie offered to provide a presentation to the Board of the greater plan at a later date.

Doug Wolfgang asked about the timeline for the Martinsburg Digester project.

Ryan responded that under different circumstances the project would be near completion, but as to the current status, a tentative timeline is on the OTO webpage.

**Proposed Creation of AAB Subcommittee for the 2028 PAG-12 CAFO Permit Reissuance (Action) – Gene Rickard, Water Program Specialist, Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management**

Gene made a verbal request that the Board consider the creation of a subcommittee for the 2028 PAG-12 CAFO Permit reissuance. Gene added that, if accepted, DEP Agriculture Compliance and NPDES Permitting staff members will engage with the AAB PAG-12 subcommittee throughout the process of the reissuance.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked for a motion to standup a subcommittee to form a work group for the 2028 NPDES CAFO permit reissuance. Grant Gulibon made the motion, seconded by Matt Royer. The motion passed unanimously.

Jennifer asked for volunteers based on Jill Whitcomb's suggestion and Jennifer and Grant volunteered for the subcommittee.

### **Chapter 105 Program Update (Informational) – Domenic Rocco, Bureau Director, Bureau of Waterways Engineering and Wetlands**

Domenic provided an update to the Board on the Chapter 105 program. Topics covered included modernization of general permits, updates and improvements to SOPs, and the pilot program and joint permitting initiatives. Domenic addressed questions and comments from the Board.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked about common issues found with dam inspections, especially earthen dams. Domenic informed the group that rodent burrows and vegetation management (i.e., letting trees grow on a dam), are the two most common issues found.

Jill Whitcomb reiterated key points from Domenic's presentation, noting that the Chapter 105 Pilot Program is significantly underutilized by the agricultural industry. Jill emphasized that permits such as the GP-6 for agricultural stream crossings can be beneficial to farmers, particularly in Exceptional Value/High-quality (EV/HQ) watersheds where an individual permit would otherwise be required and where these types of environmental restoration projects receive priority consideration. Jill added that DEP would like to see the Ag industry utilize the Chapter 105 Pilot Program to help DEP gather data to improve the permitting programs.

Regarding the SPEED program, Jill added that CAFO permits were recently added to that program.

Pete Vanderstappen recalled that back in the 1990s, the permitting process for stream crossings took three weeks, and suggested that DEP should work to return to a simpler process. Domenic responded in agreement and stated that the Chapter 105 program is trying to head in that direction.

### **Biosolids Beneficial Use Program Update (Informational) – Richard Wright, Environmental Program Manager, Bureau of Clean Water**

Richard provided the Board with a summary of proposed changes to the beneficial use of biosolids by land application general permits including: (1) PFAS reduction strategy (monitoring and tiered approach to mitigation); (2) Permitting processing of high strength organic waste (HSOW) in anaerobic digesters at sewage treatment facilities; (3) Phosphorus reduction strategy (P-Index); and (4) On field Storage of biosolids. Richard addressed questions and comments from the Board.

Jay Patel expressed appreciation for the contributions of Jen Reed-Harry, Grant Gulibon, and Greg Hostetter to the recent biosolids stakeholder effort. Jay noted that having a diverse group of stakeholders at the table—including generators, land applicators, and representatives of end uses—was highly valuable, as it allowed participants to hear directly how the issues and impacts affect different interests.

Jennifer Reed-Harry provided additional background for those on the call, noting that landfilling biosolids is not a viable option and that biosolids are a valuable nutrient resource for the

agricultural community. Jennifer shared examples from recent conversations with farmers, including several in the Northern Tier this past year, who indicated they would have faced significant challenges without access to biosolids. Jennifer emphasized the significant value of biosolids to farmers.

Jill Whitcomb shared that during a recent presentation on permitting efficiencies and modernization to the County Commissioners Association—co-presented with Deputy Secretary Ryder—many of the questions raised focused on biosolids and agriculture. Jill noted this feedback was informative and underscored the importance of stakeholder engagement and data gathering. Jill emphasized that the information being shared was pre-draft and intended to provide early awareness for the Board, given the long-standing relevance of the Biosolids general permits (dating back to 2009, with updates in 2021). Jill clarified that no work products have been developed yet, and that staff will actively work on developing draft permits and bring materials back to the Board for further discussion.

Pete Vanderstappen offered an idea for using “ag bags” for long-term stacking of biosolids.

Jill replied that the program looked at NRCS standards for stacking and likes the idea of using established practices.

#### **Chapter 91 and Chapter 92a Draft Fee Reports (Informational) – Harmonie Hawley, Environmental Engineer Manager, Bureau of Clean Water**

Harmonie provided the Board with a summary of the required 3-year fee reports for Chapters 91 (Water Quality Management (WQM) permitting) and 92a (NPDES Program), which evaluate permit application fees and program expenses during prior fiscal years. Harmonie addressed questions and comments from the Board.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked whether the fee report would be presented to the Board annually and noted appreciation that a fee increase is not currently being recommended, while acknowledging that a future increase may be considered. Sean Furjanic and Harmonie Hawley clarified that a fee analysis is conducted every three years, with the next fee report scheduled for 2028, at which time fees will be evaluated and recommendations made.

Jennifer inquired about the status of available engineering staff at DEP and whether replacing retiring engineers at higher salaries with newly hired engineers at lower salaries could affect the fee report. Jennifer expressed a concern as to whether DEP will have sufficient engineering capacity, in the near future, to complete the permitting work needed by the agricultural industry.

In response, Jill Whitcomb, Domenic Rocco, Doug Wolfgang, and Pete Vanderstappen discussed that a shortage of engineers at DEP and in the private sector is an ongoing concern.

**Officer Elections (Action) – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

Grant Gulibon made a nomination to be Chair. Nate Clark made a motion to accept Grant as Chair, seconded by Bill Evans. Motion passed unanimously.

Grant nominated and made a motion for Jennifer Reed-Harry to stand as Vice-Chair, seconded by Destiny Zeiders. Motion passed unanimously.

Grant Gulibon will be Chair, and Jennifer Reed-Harry, Vice-Chair, beginning in 2026.

**Approval of 2026 Meeting Schedule (Action) – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

Meeting dates for 2026 were not finalized. A meeting for February 5, 2026 was approved and it was planned to finalize the remaining meeting dates for 2026 at that meeting.

**General Discussion/Agenda Topics Request – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

No discussion occurred or agenda topics requested. Jennifer reminded that group to email Bob Haines or Grant Gulibon with any agenda item requests.

**Adjourn – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair**

Jennifer called for a motion to adjourn. The motion made by Nate Clark, seconded by Destiny Zeiders, was unanimously approved, and the meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

**Next Meeting:** Thursday, February 5, 2026, at 1 p.m.