

Overview of the Proposed Plant and Pollinator Protection Act: **SB 1198**

Issue

Pennsylvania's apiary and plant industry account for \$83.5 billion to the state's economy. These businesses rely on local consumers, as well as domestic and international markets, to thrive. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture oversees these industries to ensure they are mitigating the risk of spreading pests and plant diseases and ensuring they are practicing sound industry standards.

The laws that the Bureau of Plant Industry use to regulate these industries have not been updated in 30 years while these sectors have grown exponentially along with diseases and pest threats. This has caused a deficit in the number and quality of services the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry can provide to Pennsylvania businesses.

Background

Since 1921, Pennsylvania has had a Bee Law to protect bees from diseases that can cause major economic issues for the apiary industry. Pennsylvania has similarly had a Plant Pest Act since 1937 to protect the Commonwealth's plant resources from pests. Both laws have been important to the health of Pennsylvania's plants and pollinators. Since their passing however, there have been many changes in trade practices, the science of plant and pollinator health, the Department of Agriculture's enforcement authority, and the cost of simply doing business.

The proposed Plant and Pollinator Protection Act combines both the Bee Law and the Plant Pest Act. It also establishes a new risk-based assessment for inspections, establishes opportunities to provide state approved verification programs, and will continue to improve plant and pollinator health.

The risk-based program increases the frequency of inspections at businesses that have a higher risk of spreading plant diseases and pests, including invasive species. The risk-based program creates an early detection system for pests and invasive species. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania estimates the annual impact of invasive species in Pennsylvania is over \$100 million. A risk-based program will help reduce those costs over time by identifying pests in the green industries before they spread further.

The Plant and Pollinator Protection Act will allow the Department of Agriculture to offer state approved verification programs for plant growers and beekeepers. These programs will provide Pennsylvania producers access to trading partners across the U.S. and internationally. They also allow Pennsylvania companies to expand sales to other markets that have specific shipping requirements - markets they would not otherwise be able to access without the Department provided verification.

It has been 30 years since fees were last increased, which has caused a deficit in number and quality of services the Bureau of Plant Industry can provide. These fees fund services like apiary and plant inspections. The Plant and Pollinator Protection Act will generate more revenue to cover the costs of the Bureau of Plant Industry's expenses and allow them to maintain the level of service the industry expects.

Top things to know

Extensive stakeholder outreach was involved in the drafting of the Plant and Pollinator Protection Act. Industry groups were integral in crafting the language in this new bill, and it has strong stakeholder and industry support. It was driven and initiated by stakeholders over many years.

The Plant and Pollinator Protection Act would:

- Improve customer service by updating and clarifying details in two outdated laws – the Bee Law and the Plant Pest Act.
- Prevent the spread of pests and pathogens by establishing a risk-based assessment for inspections. This will save the state money by catching pests and pathogens before they spread further. This would also help reduce pesticide use.
- Help Pennsylvania producers be more competitive. Providing highly sought after state-approved verification programs allow businesses to access more trading partners across the U.S. and internationally.
- Benefit pollinators by expanding management authority and protections to more species than just the honeybee. This is critical because the pollinators that benefit our crops contribute \$260 million to Pennsylvania’s economy annually.