

2018 Farm Bill: An Update on the Hemp Industry Public Hearing Testimony Highlights

March 2026

On January 15, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors hosted the public hearing, *2018 Farm Bill: An Update on the Hemp Industry*, during the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg. The hearing brought together Board members, elected officials, state agency representatives, legal and scientific experts, and members of Pennsylvania's hemp business community to examine the impacts of the 2018 Farm Bill and subsequent legislative and regulatory changes affecting the hemp industry.

Testifiers shared perspectives on the economic impact of hemp, key legal and scientific considerations shaping the industry in Pennsylvania, and challenges and opportunities facing hemp-related businesses. The hearing also provided a forum to discuss regulatory compliance, enforcement issues, and emerging research related to hemp production and products.

The Center extends its sincere thanks to all testifiers who participated and contributed their time and expertise. Their insights helped advance a more comprehensive understanding of the policy, regulatory, and economic factors shaping the hemp industry in Pennsylvania.

Key Takeaways

- **Frank Schneider, Director of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture:** Schneider testified that Pennsylvania rebuilt its hemp program through permitting and grant investments, yet acreage declined from approximately 1,000 acres in 2020 to 177 acres in 2025 due to limited processing capacity and unclear markets. He emphasized that continued supply chain investment is needed for growth.
- **Chris Lindsey, Vice President of Policy and State Advocacy, American Trade Association for Cannabis and Hemp:** Lindsey testified that the 2018 Farm Bill was intended to regulate agriculture, not intoxicating retail products, yet converted synthetic THC entered markets without oversight. He urged Pennsylvania to exclude synthetic THC, regulate intoxicants through cannabis systems, and strengthen enforcement.
- **Beau Whitney, Chief Economist, Whitney Economics:** Whitney testified that hemp-derived cannabinoid sales exceed 28 billion dollars nationally, with Pennsylvania's market estimated up to 1.4 billion dollars annually, but warned regulatory uncertainty is suppressing investment and driving acreage decline.
- **Kevin R. Steele, District Attorney, Montgomery County:** Steele testified that many smoke shop products tested exceeded legal THC limits, with falsified laboratory reports common and emergency medical incidents reported. He called for updated THC definitions, age limits, and mandatory accredited testing.
- **John Adams, District Attorney, Berks County, Pennsylvania; Communications Chair, Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association:** Adams testified that products seized in Berks County consistently exceeded legal THC thresholds, raising concerns about youth access and misleading marketing. He urged legislative action to establish testing, labeling, age controls, and enforcement authority.
- **Kevin McKernan, Chief Scientific Officer and Founder, Medicinal Genomics:** McKernan testified that hemp loopholes created a large unregulated intoxicant market now exceeding 28 billion dollars annually. He advocated unified science-based safety standards for all consumable cannabinoid products.
- **Jake Sitler, President, Pennsylvania Hemp and Cannabis Guild; Owner of Endo Café, Lancaster County:** Sitler testified that regulatory uncertainty stalled hiring, construction, and rural financing. He urged an agriculture-first framework with finished products regulated through clear safety standards.
- **Tyler Shannon, Owner and Farmer, Shannon Family Farm, Adams County:** Shannon testified that CBD hemp is the only profitable crop sustaining his family farm and warned proposed federal THC limits would eliminate CBD production. He recommended a 1-percent total THC standard, age verification, transparent testing, and bans on synthetic cannabinoids.
- **Cynthia Petrone-Hudock, Co-Chair, Hemp Steering Committee, and Owner, Hemp Alternative:** Petrone-Hudock testified that hemp includes distinct markets with different risk profiles and warned overbroad federal proposals could chill rural investment. She called for product-focused regulation with enforceable retail standards including testing, labeling, age limits, and reasonable potency caps.

Panel 1: Commonwealth Efforts Related to the Hemp Industry and an Overview of the Federal Farm Bill and Hemp Industry

Frank Schneider, Director of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Frank Schneider, testified on the Commonwealth's hemp program and efforts to rebuild a modern industry following decades of federal prohibition. He traced current operations to the 2016 Industrial Hemp Research Law and subsequent legislation that enabled grower and processor permitting. Schneider highlighted state investments supporting farmers and market development, including education grants, Specialty Crop Block Grants, and Agricultural Innovation Grant funding. Despite these efforts, he reported hemp acreage declined from approximately 1,000 acres in 2020 to 177 acres in 2025, largely due to limited processing capacity and unclear post-harvest markets. He also noted emerging applications such as fiber processing, potting media, composite products, and animal feed. Schneider concluded that hemp offers economic and environmental opportunity, but sustained growth will require continued investment across the supply chain, particularly in post-harvest processing and commercialization.

Chris Lindsey, Vice President of Policy and State Advocacy, American Trade Association for Cannabis and Hemp

Chris Lindsey, testified about regulatory confusion surrounding intoxicating hemp products and urged Pennsylvania to align state law with recent federal changes. He explained that the 2018 Farm Bill focused on agricultural production and did not intend to authorize retail intoxicants. Lindsey described how chemically converted THC products entered consumer markets without oversight and emphasized that states retain primary responsibility for regulation. He encouraged Pennsylvania to exclude synthetic THC from hemp, route intoxicating products into regulated cannabis systems, define lawful, non-intoxicating products, and strengthen enforcement authority to protect public health.

Beau Whitney, Chief Economist, Whitney Economics

Beau Whitney, testified on national and state hemp market conditions, stating that hemp has broader economic potential than marijuana across multiple industries. He explained that rapid expansion after 2018 exceeded processing capacity, leading to price declines and financial strain. Whitney reported that hemp-derived cannabinoid sales now exceed \$28

billion nationally and estimated Pennsylvania's market could reach up to \$1.4 billion annually. He also noted declining acreage in Pennsylvania and warned that policy uncertainty could displace workers and suppress investment. Whitney urged balanced regulation to stabilize markets and support long-term economic growth.

Panel 2: Legal and Scientific Perspectives on the Hemp Industry

Kevin R. Steele, District Attorney, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Kevin R. Steele, District Attorney of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, testified on findings from a county investigative grand jury examining unregulated smoke shops. Steele reported that seized products purchased from retailers showed that many exceeded legal THC limits and that falsified laboratory reports were commonly used. He cited emergency medical incidents involving children and adults and emphasized the lack of statewide standards for age restrictions, testing, labeling, and ingredients. Steele urged adoption of updated THC definitions, a minimum purchase age of 21, and mandatory accredited laboratory testing.

John Adams, District Attorney, Berks County, Pennsylvania; Communications Chair, Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association

John Adams, testified about investigations into smoke shops selling marijuana disguised as hemp. Adams reported that seized products consistently exceeded legal THC thresholds and raised concerns about youth access, misleading marketing, and potential chemical contaminants. He called for legislative action to establish testing requirements, age controls, labeling standards, and enforcement authority to support law enforcement and protect consumers.

Kevin McKernan, Chief Scientific Officer and Founder, Medicinal Genomics

Kevin McKernan, testified that hemp policy loopholes enabled intoxicating products to enter commerce without safety standards, creating a large unregulated market. He reported hemp-derived cannabinoid sales now exceed \$28 billion annually while regulated medical cannabis operators remain subject to strict oversight. McKernan advocated for unified science-based safety requirements for all consumable cannabinoid products and proposed consistent testing for contaminants and synthetic compounds to protect public health.

Panel 3: Pennsylvania's Hemp Business Community

Jake Sitler, President, Pennsylvania Hemp and Cannabis Guild; Owner of Endo Café, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Jake Sitler, testified on the impacts of regulatory uncertainty on farmers and rural entrepreneurs. He described delayed hiring, stalled construction projects, and lost financing resulting from shifting policy signals. Sitler emphasized that hemp is an agricultural crop and urged lawmakers to preserve an agriculture-first framework, with finished products regulated through clear safety standards. He advocated keeping hemp oversight within the Department of Agriculture and targeting enforcement toward unsafe practices rather than lawful farming.

Tyler Shannon, Owner and Farmer, Shannon Family Farm, Adams County, Pennsylvania

Tyler Shannon, testified that cannabidiol (CBD) hemp is the only crop profitable enough to sustain his family farm and warned proposed federal THC limits would effectively eliminate CBD hemp production. Shannon described hemp as a \$28 billion industry and emphasized that fiber and grain hemp cannot replace CBD economically for small farms. He urged adoption of a 1-percent total THC standard, age verification, transparent testing, cultivation permits, and bans on synthetic cannabinoids to protect consumers while preserving family farms.

Cynthia Petrone-Hudock, Co-Chair, Hemp Steering Committee; Owner, Hemp Alternative

Cynthia Petrone-Hudock, testified on behalf of Pennsylvania's hemp business community, emphasizing the need for risk-based, product-focused regulation. She explained that hemp encompasses distinct markets with different risk profiles and warned that overbroad federal proposals could chill rural investment. Petrone-Hudock recommended enforceable retail standards including testing, labeling, age limits, and reasonable potency caps. She concluded that regulatory certainty is essential to support compliant businesses, protect consumers, and advance rural economic development.

Submitted Written Testimony:

Ms. Meredith Buettner Schneider, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Cannabis Coalition

Meredith Buettner Schneider, testified that hemp and cannabis are the same plant and that consumable cannabinoids should be regulated under a single framework with consistent standards for testing, labeling, packaging, and age restrictions. She explained that fragmented oversight has created confusion for consumers, challenges for compliant businesses, and opportunities for illegal operators to exploit

regulatory gaps. Buettner Schneider cited Act 44 of 2021 as a successful model that allowed hemp-derived ingredients to enter Pennsylvania's medical marijuana program, expanding patient access while providing a regulated outlet for hemp farmers. She urged adoption of unified regulation to close loopholes that allow untested products to be sold without age verification and emphasized that coordinated oversight would protect public health, support compliant growers, and strengthen Pennsylvania's cannabis marketplace.

Mariah Shaw, Government Relations Director, Terrapin Care Station, Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania

Mariah Shaw, testified about Terrapin's role in expanding regulated medical marijuana access in rural Central Pennsylvania. She described how Terrapin selected Central Pennsylvania after identifying significant healthcare access gaps, noting that prior to Terrapin's entry, some patients traveled more than 100 miles for care and only two dispensaries served a regional population of approximately 215,000 people. Shaw explained that Terrapin's licensed facilities operate under strict Department of Health protocols, including electronic age verification, controlled access, on-site pharmacists, security staffing, and seed-to-sale tracking, contrasting this oversight with unregulated intoxicating hemp retailers that lack comparable safeguards. She emphasized that Pennsylvania's medical marijuana program has demonstrated strong compliance and patient safety over more than eight years and urged policymakers to apply consistent regulatory standards across all intoxicating products, including those derived from hemp, to ensure consumer protection and accountability statewide.

Jesse Worsk, Co-Founder, Black Bear Dispensary, Grove City, Pennsylvania

Jesse Worsk, testified as a disabled combat veteran, third generation Pennsylvania dairy farmer, and small business owner who operates five mostly rural retail locations employing approximately 40 Pennsylvanians. He described working across multiple state cannabis markets and helping launch Pennsylvania's first dispensaries, emphasizing that local businesses reinvest profits in their communities, while out-of-state operators export wealth to corporate headquarters. Worsk warned that market consolidation, vertical integration rules favoring large operators, and limits on new licensees have diminished opportunities for Pennsylvania based entrepreneurs, making it difficult for small operators to survive price compression. He urged lawmakers to expand local license caps, ensure access to processing and vertical integration, remove income-based ownership barriers, keep oversight rooted in the Department of Agriculture, and align state code with federal CBD benefits to support rural communities and long-term economic opportunity.

Thank You

Thank you to the hearing participants who presented testimony:

- Frank Schneider, Director of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
- Chris Lindsey, Vice President of Policy and State Advocacy, American Trade Association for Cannabis and Hemp
- Beau Whitney, Chief Economist, Whitney Economics
- Kevin R. Steele, District Attorney, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
- John Adams, District Attorney, Berks County, Pennsylvania; Communications Chair, Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association
- Kevin McKernan, Chief Scientific Officer and Founder, Medicinal Genomics
- Jake Sitler, President, Pennsylvania Hemp and Cannabis Guild; Owner of Endo Café, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
- Tyler Shannon, Owner and Farmer, Shannon Family Farm, Adams County, Pennsylvania
- Cynthia Petrone-Hudock, Co-Chair, Hemp Steering Committee; Owner, Hemp Alternative

Written testimony submissions:

- Meredith Buettner Schneider, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Cannabis Coalition
- Mariah Shaw, Government Relations Director, Terrapin Care Station, Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania
- Mr. Jesse Worsk, Co-Founder, Black Bear Dispensary, Grove City, Pennsylvania

Scan the QR code for the public hearing agenda, testimony, and recording.



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