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Wolf Administration to Reimburse County Fair Boards for Harness Races Held Despite Cancelled Fairs

Harrisburg, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding today announced Governor Tom Wolf's approval of a legal waiver allowing the department to reimburse local fair boards for harness races held at otherwise cancelled fairs. The waiver, approved July 6, was made possible by the [Governor's June 3, 2020 Disaster Emergency Declaration](#). It will affect 11 county fairs that have scheduled or held harness races in 2020, while cancelling their fairs to diminish public health risks tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The thrill of harness racing draws crowds to some of our finest Pennsylvania fairs," Secretary Redding said. "Protecting public health in this extraordinary year has meant missing out on the educational value, cultural experience and excitement our fairs provide, so we are pleased to make it possible for a slice of the fair tradition to carry on safely without risking the finances of local fair boards."

Sixteen of Pennsylvania's 108 agricultural fairs host harness-racing competitions, and the department reimburses organizers for costs allowed under the state's Race Horse Industry Reform Act. The department's State Horse Racing Commission Bureau of Standardbred Racing distributes reimbursements from the Fair Fund. The wording of the law would have precluded reimbursements if the fair hosting the race was not held. The waiver provides a means for local fair boards to hold these races and recoup up to \$12,500 for expenses such as purse money, track and stable maintenance, starting gate rental, and wages for race-day officials.

In 2019, the bureau issued more than \$241,000 in reimbursements and marketing expenses for races at county and local fairs or fairgrounds, and \$17,500 for races at Silver Springs Ranch, an independent training facility in Harvey's Lake, Luzerne County.

Organizers of 75 Pennsylvania fairs made the decision to cancel their fairs this year in order to safeguard public health and minimize the spread of COVID-19. Of the 16 fairs that host harness races, Butler, Greene and Indiana County Fairs have cancelled their 2020 races. Bloomsburg Fair in Columbia County and Somerset County Fair will hold their fairs as well as harness racing events.

Management of the following fairs have scheduled harness racing events despite cancelling fairs: Bedford County Fair, Clearfield County Fair, Crawford County Fair, Dayton Fair in Armstrong County, Erie County Fair, Gratz Fair in Dauphin County, Great Stoneboro Fair in Mercer County, Lycoming County Fair, Washington County Fair, Wayne County Fair and York Fair. These races will be held without spectators but may be streamed online or broadcast locally. Check each fair's website for up-to-date information on attendance guidelines and restrictions due to COVID-19.

Visit agriculture.pa.gov for more information about standardbred racing in Pennsylvania, and a [2020 schedule of harness races](#) held in Pennsylvania. The PA Fair Sire Stake Championships will be held at [The Meadows Racetrack and Casino](#) in Washington County on October 12, 2020.