

Testimony of Jim Angelucci, Phillips Mushroom Farms

On behalf of the American Mushroom Institute

Before the Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture

July 21, 2010

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Jim Angelucci, the General Manager of Phillips Mushroom Farms, a third generation, family-owned company with mushroom growing facilities in Kennett Square, PA and Warwick, MD.

I'm pleased today to give you some real world examples of how the public policy decisions you make result in programs with tangible and positive impacts for the mushroom industry and for consumers.

The mushroom farm community is particularly proud of our food safety record. Fresh mushrooms have never been associated with a food-borne illness outbreak. Since mushrooms are grown indoors, certain risks are minimized, but we have our own set of unique challenges.

Following the 2006 e coli outbreaks in spinach, the mushroom industry realized we had to step up our on-farm food safety programs in order to assure our customers of the safety of our product and to satisfy the increasing demand for audits. In response, we came together and developed an industry-wide food safety standard specific to the growing, harvesting and shipping of fresh mushrooms. It is known as MGAP – the Mushroom Good Agricultural Practices program.

MGAP is consistent with the FDA Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. It is focused on the risks involved in production and based on science; it is attainable, auditable and verifiable. But just developing a program doesn't necessarily mean growers will follow it; so our next and even more challenging task was how to get growers to implement it.

At this point you may be asking what these voluntary food safety efforts have to do with the 2008 Farm Bill and today's hearing.

Funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture through the Farm Bill's Specialty Crop Block Grant program has supported the development and implementation of the MGAP program. Block grants funds were spent to develop food safety worker training programs, a website where growers can access all the MGAP materials, including the standards, guidelines, training tools, and forms needed for audit documentation. These tools are important so a grower can spend his or her time on implementation not on designing checklists and schedules.

But first, to gauge the feasibility of the program, we ran a pilot program at a small farm testing all the materials we developed. We made modifications based on their experiences. Finally,

we held four training sessions with an overwhelming turnout. By using web-based tools and train-the-trainer workshops, we have disseminated food safety messages to literally thousands of our workers. And by combining funds from the American Mushroom Institute and the Mushroom Council, we were able to expand our reach to all commercial mushroom farms in the United States. We received technical assistance from Penn State University, private consultants, and most importantly, from our industry leaders who volunteered their time and talents.

In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has used a portion of block grant funding to provide a cost share program for Good Agricultural Practice audits conducted by USDA – not only for mushroom growers but for all Pennsylvania fruit and vegetable growers

With increased frequency, produce buyers – be they large packer/shippers, foodservice vendors or retail outlets – are requiring GAP audits, all at the expense of the grower. For any farm, but particularly a small operation, establishing a documented food safety program can be expensive and time consuming. Having all or a part of the cost of an audit reimbursed through the Specialty Crop Block Grant program has motivated farms to implement the MGAP program.

I understand that during consideration of the farm bill, questions arose as to why the funds should go through state departments of agriculture. Sixty-five percent of all U.S. mushrooms are grown in Pennsylvania. Therefore, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture understands the needs and concerns of our industry and recognizes our importance to the state's economy. It just makes sense that a state department of agriculture would have a better perspective on the local needs of the farmers they serve.

As for accountability, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and USDA have required extensive progress and final reports outlining not only what has been accomplished but quantitative information on the impact of the projects.

So how do you measure success? Since the auditable MGAP program has been in place – about 18 months, half of the mushroom farms in the U.S. (and over 60 percent in Pennsylvania) have successfully passed a MGAP audit. Even more importantly, these farms represent over 85 percent of U.S. production.

In Pennsylvania, we have primarily small growers who struggle daily with the rising costs of production. They would not have been able to do this on their own. The work achieved through the Specialty Crop Block Grant funds resulted in an even safer food product and a documented program to enhance consumer confidence. As we face new food safety legislation and regulations from FDA, the mushroom industry feels that we are clearly prepared, and the Specialty Crop Block grants have played a large role in our success.

Thank you.

James A. Angelucci
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For 37 years, I have held various positions with Phillips Mushroom Farms, the largest producer/marketer of specialty mushrooms in the United States. Currently, I am employed as the General Manager.

Industry-related positions include:

- 1980 to 1996: **Board of Directors, American Mushroom Institute**
 - Vice Chairman - 2 terms
 - Chairman of the Board - 2 terms
- Awarded the **American Mushroom Institute Distinguished Service Award** in 1987 for "*Exemplary Leadership, Service and Personal Contributions Which have Improved the Mushroom Agri-Business.*"
- In 1994 appointed to the **Mushroom Council**; **Served as Chairman of the board 2003-2005**. Appointed in January 2010 to 5th 3 year term.
- **Board of Directors, American Mushroom Institute Community Awareness Committee**;
- **Board of Directors, The Pennsylvania Fresh Mushroom Committee**;
- **Representative** for The Pennsylvania Fresh Mushroom Committee on the **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Commodity Round Table**;
- **Founding member** and **Past Chairman** (5 years) of the **Mushroom Ombudsman Program**;
- **Active participant** and **speaker** at several **local, national and international mushroom conferences**;
- **Board of Directors, annual Mushroom Festival**;
- **Committee Member** of the **Penn State University Extension Advisory Committee**;
- **Committee Member** of the **Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Ag Labor Advisory Committee**;
- **Committee Member** of the **Mushroom Committee of the PFB (Pennsylvania Farm Bureau)**

