

State Rep. David Kessler  
D-Berks  
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**Kessler organic farming bill would boost farmers' income, environment**  
*Hearing in Berks County planned for April 10*

**HARRISBURG, March 12** – State Rep. David Kessler, D-Berks, has introduced bipartisan legislation ([H.B. 2347](#)) that would help farmers who want to convert to organic agriculture. Participation would be entirely voluntary. "A great way to preserve farmland is to make farming more profitable," Kessler said.

Kessler has been meeting for eight months with staff of the Rodale Institute, located in northern Berks County, to help develop this legislation. The institute is a worldwide authority on organic farming.

"Organic food is the fastest-growing sector of the food industry and provides a net return to farmers as much as two to three times higher than for conventionally raised farm products," Kessler said. "I have visited livestock and crop farms ranging from 100 to 300 acres that switched, and once they got through the transition period, those farms became more profitable. Their profit margins went up because no-till farming uses less fuel and organic farming eliminates the need for chemicals and pesticides.

"Organic farming produces 35 to 70 percent higher yields in drought conditions, and it can also produce a small reduction in flooding – organically farmed land can absorb more water since it retains more pockets of air.

"If every farm in Pennsylvania used organic no-till practices, it would have a carbon-sequestering effect equal to taking 2 to 3 million cars off the roads. In addition, no-till farmers can qualify for another source of income -- payments for sequestering carbon – which at least one Berks County farmer is already receiving," Kessler said.

"All of these gains benefit the farmers' bottom line and the environment, including Chesapeake Bay cleanup efforts. There are organic agriculture opportunities in Pennsylvania – for example, some organic dairy farmers in Pennsylvania have to get organic hay shipped from out-of-state to feed their cows."

Kessler said the bill will include a program to reimburse producers for their transition costs and losses such as a temporary drop in yields, which would allow them to convert thousands of acres from conventional to organic farming.

"In the first two to four years, farmers who switch typically see lower yields, but as the soil returns to a more natural state, their yields are the same as before, or better," he said. "And by boosting farm income, we would also boost efforts to preserve farmland in fast-growing parts of Berks County and other areas of Pennsylvania."

As secretary of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, Kessler is arranging with Chairman Mike Hanna, D-Clinton/Centre, to bring the committee to Berks County on April 10 for a hearing on the bill.

Last month, Kessler testified before the House Appropriations Committee in favor of the pending legislation. He was joined by Dr. Timothy LaSalle, chief executive officer of the Rodale Institute, who told the committee that 27 years of research by Rodale has shown that putting organic matter back in the soil can help farmers to match or outproduce conventional farming.

Kessler said Minnesota, Vermont and Wisconsin are among several states that already have adopted legislation to promote organic farming.

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**PHOTO CAPTION INFORMATION:** At a recent House Appropriations Committee hearing, state Rep. David Kessler, D-Berks, testifies about his pending legislation to promote organic farming. Pictured at right is Dr. Timothy LaSalle, chief executive officer of the Rodale Institute, who also testified in favor of Kessler's bill.

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