

Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture  
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**NEWS RELEASE**  
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**COMMISSIONER LEONHARDT URGES GOVERNOR AND  
LEGISLATURE TO REACH BUDGET COMPROMISE**

**Charleston, W.Va.** – West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Kent Leonhardt is calling upon Governor Jim Justice and the West Virginia Legislature to work together to come up with a compromise on the fiscal year 18 budget. Commissioner Leonhardt sights that a government shutdown would be devastating to food safety and the food supply in West Virginia.

“Food safety is our biggest concern if we did reach a government shutdown. If our regulators cannot do their job, we could see outbreaks of foodborne illnesses that would be catastrophic to some of our largest industries in West Virginia and a strain on our health care system,” stressed Commissioner Leonhardt. “Our department is taking the necessary steps in case of a shutdown, but if we do get to that point it will be disastrous for agriculture in the Mountain State.”

The poultry industry is the largest agriculture-based industry in West Virginia, grossing over \$400 million in sales every year. Three states in close proximity to West Virginia - Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama, have reported outbreaks of Avian Influenza already this year. In previous years, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) has shut down poultry swaps and exhibitions as preventive measures in case of an outbreak. West Virginia has not had a case of Avian Flu since 2007.

“In a time when our state is struggling, we cannot put at risk multimillion dollar industries,” continued Leonhardt. “Our state is desperate for innovation and economic diversification; a government shutdown achieves just the opposite. For the sake of our great state, our legislative leaders need to come together to find a solution that moves the state forward.”

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