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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PCO Annual Member Meeting Highlights Growth, Next Steps for the Organization

SPRING MILLS, PA (December 4, 2018) -- Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO), a nonprofit organization that offers organic certification services throughout the United States, held its annual membership meeting in Bellefonte, PA on Wednesday, November 28, 2018. The business portion of the meeting was followed by a listening session with Johanna Mirenda, Organic Trade Association (OTA) Farm Policy Director. For the first time in the organization's history, the annual meeting was streamed, which allowed non-local members to participate.

The meeting opened with an acknowledgement of the organization's most prominent news from 2018 – the departure of PCO founder and long-time Executive Director, Leslie Zuck. Zuck left the position in September of the year and her role is currently being filled by two interim directors: Kyla Smith, PCO's Director of Certification, and Diana Underwood, PCO's Director of Operations. Smith and Underwood, both of whom have been with PCO for several years, are serving in this capacity while the board launches a search for Ms. Zuck's successor.

"We're really grateful, all of PCO, and I'm sure our membership is grateful, for Ms. Zuck's vision, leadership and tireless service on behalf of PCO," Luke Howard, PCO Board President and operator of Homestead Farms, Inc., stated. "During the transition, the board has the utmost confidence in our staff and leadership at PCO to continue the professional and exemplary service that we provide to all of our members."

Howard praised Smith and Underwood for their performance since stepping into their new roles, both their management of the transition period and their commitment to moving the organization forward. And, from the growth numbers reported during the business meeting, it was clear that leadership has been critical. It was noted that PCO has maintained its position as the fifth largest certifier in the nation, with approximately 1,600 certified organic clients, and grew its PCO 100% Grassfed certification by 173% between 2016 and 2017. It was acknowledged that this growth would not be possible without the organization's members.

"If you think about the growth that we have had as an organization, it really has been phenomenal," Howard said. "And anyone who has run a business, you know how hard it is to

manage vast growth. I think the people at PCO, with their leadership, have done a great job at managing that growth; but it's through our membership that we have that strength."

At the conclusion of the business portion of the meeting, OTA Farm Policy Director, and former PCO employee, Johanna Miranda led a listening session on OTA's work and the role of farmers in shaping that work. Miranda used her time at the gathering to engage with attendees on priority issues from OTA's Farmer Advisory Council work plan: pesticide and GMO contamination, dairy industry issues, labor shortage and climate change. Miranda stressed her responsibility in elevating the voices of small farmers on these issues and understanding their impact on farmers' daily lives. OTA offers small farmers from member organizations, such as PCO, an opportunity to join the Farmers Advisory Council at a discounted price.

After PCO members discussed underlying causes for big issues, the event ended with a dinner. Howard urged members to respond to a satisfaction survey and to vote in the 2019 PCO Board Member Election by December 17, 2018.

PCO is a non-profit organization based in Spring Mills, Pennsylvania, that educates and certifies more than 1,600 organic farms and processors. For information on organic certification, contact PCO at www.paorganic.org, 814-422-0251.

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