



# A M E R I C A N M U S H R O O M

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**Testimony Before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on  
Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, Research  
Written Statement of Testimony  
Testimony of Chris Alonzo  
Owner/Operator, Pietro Industries  
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Senator Fetterman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about the mushroom industry. My name is Chris Alonzo, and I'm a 3rd generation mushroom grower from Pennsylvania. I've been growing mushrooms my whole life. While production in other states such as California, Oklahoma, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee is also strong, Pennsylvania produces 2/3 of the country's mushrooms. We do this 365 days a year, employing over 10,000 people in our Commonwealth.

Our farm, Pietro, was founded in 1938 by my grandfather, and today employs nearly 200 people. My grandfather was a founding member of our Trade Association, American Mushroom, and I am here representing that industry association, as well. I'm also a former board member of our USDA-based Mushroom Council.

Mushrooms are a uniquely nutritious fresh and functional food--a great source of protein and disease-fighting properties. Researchers have identified and tested cancer-inhibiting compounds in the common supermarket mushroom and have found that adding a mushroom serving to the diet increases the intake of several micronutrients, including shortfall nutrients such as vitamin D. (Food Science & Nutrition (January 2021)) Last, mushrooms have a universally compatible "umami" flavor, and are hearty and filling, which makes them uniquely able to enhance and economically extend both plant-based and meat-including diets, alike.

Mushrooms are uniquely sustainable, as well. They reuse water and grow on a small footprint: The equivalent of one acre of land can produce 1 million pounds of mushrooms annually. Mushroom compost, the bedding material needed to grow mushrooms, is formulated using up to 30 recycled ag byproducts, from poultry litter to corn stover to hay and wheat byproducts. This mitigates direct runoff and watershed impact for other farms by taking their crop waste. Mushroom growers therefore produce not only mushrooms, but a reusable, value-add soil amendment that sequesters carbon and regenerates soil.

All of these nutrition and mushroom compost discoveries have come from investment in research. Yet, the mushroom industry lacks critical resources required to stay competitive when it comes to operations. In an increasingly fast-paced agricultural sector, mushrooms need research on integrated pest management (IPM) to mitigate fungi-specific pests and pathogens; research on the beneficial uses of mushroom compost, which, *not* a fertilizer, sequesters carbon and regenerates soil; research on harvesting mechanization for increased yield, quality, and employee augmentation and retention; and research on the potential value to the industry of crop insurance.

Too perishable to import or export overseas, fresh mushrooms are a national commodity and should be treasured. But we need help. Mushroom farmers are truly feeding America, and your support of research through the Farm Bill will strengthen this agricultural legacy for many years to come.