

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture

July 28, 2021

Finfish Farm – The Aquaculture Coordinator and other NJDA staff have been working with staff at the Economic Development Authority, the Governor's Office and NJDEP on providing technical assistance to a prospective finfish farm. The farm operator is proposing to use a recirculating system, but at a scale where potential water use, and discharge require coordination with multiple agencies. Recirculating aquaculture systems require minimal water exchange relative to the total volume within the facility. For large-scale systems, daily water needs can be high enough that site selection is critical for both source water availability and discharge locations.

Honeybee Hive Relocation – The State Apiarist was contacted by the Millville Fire Department, Cumberland County, to remove honeybees. These honeybees were living in a stack of pallets next to a structure fire. With the help of local beekeepers, the hive was safely removed and relocated to Al's Bee Yard in Franklin Township, Gloucester County. This resulted in ample opportunity for educating the public as we spoke to many firefighters and police about honeybees and their importance. The Millville Fire Department published a Facebook post that was shared 67 times and liked by almost 250 people. This bee removal also resulted in a newspaper article in The Vineland Daily Journal.

Animal Health Diagnostic Lab FDA Flexible Funding Model Grant – The FDA LFFM grant provides special 1-year funding to the Animal Health Diagnostic Lab for COVID wastewater surveillance. The wastewater surveillance project targets areas inhabited by agriculture and food production workers because such areas are under-represented in current surveillance streams. The funding will support sample collection and whole-genome sequencing of the SarsCoV-2 from wastewater. The wastewater surveillance will help identify the variants of the SarsCoV-2 before they spread in general population.

Marketing Grant Programs – Marketing and Development Division staff are fulfilling required obligations under our grant programs, Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG), Animal Feed Regulatory Program Standards (AFRPS) Produce Safety, Livestock, Risk Management (RMA), Rural Development, Organic Cost Share, and Wine Industry Grants, including research and development. In addition, staff is monitoring Grant Proposal Awards and preparing proposals. The 2021 SCBG has been submitted to the USDA and is awaiting award.

Department of Defense Fresh Program – The Department of Defense (DoD) banks have been loaded for School Year 2021-22 and orders can now be placed to assist with the School Food Authorities (SFAs) Summer Meal Programs. At this time, Food Distribution is working with DoD to set up 21 new SFAs that applied to participate in the USDA DoD Fresh Program.

Virtual CASE Institute – The Office of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Education in partnership with Rutgers University School of Environmental & Biological Sciences hosted a multi-state Virtual Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education (CASE) Institute professional development session on July 12-21 for the Plant Science pathway. Principles of Agricultural Science - Plant (ASP) is a foundation-level course teaching students the form and function of plant systems. Student experiences include the study of plant anatomy and physiology, classification, and the fundamentals of production and harvesting. Twenty educators from nine states attended the event. Three of these participants were pre-service teachers (college students preparing to be ag teachers). Two study at Rutgers University and one studies at Delaware Valley University. Getting certified in CASE courses is a great professional development opportunity and resume highlight.

Animal Emergency Pet Sheltering Meeting – The animal emergency preparedness coordinator arranged for a virtual emergency pet sheltering meeting amongst multiple agencies. The American Red Cross' (ARC) Regional Mass Care Manager was in attendance and reported the ARC's plan for mass care sheltering this season. In contrast to the 2020 season, where the primary sheltering mode was non-congregate, the ARC will now shift back to congregate sheltering with public health safety policies in place. The ARC representative coordinated with County Animal Response Team (CART) leaders present to initiate planning for preidentified co-located ARC shelters in New Jersey. Also in attendance were members of various county Office of Emergency Management and the USDA ESF-11 coordinator. The group agreed to schedule a coordination meeting.

Mexican Bean Beetle Program – The Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory (PABIL) produced 140,450 *Pediobius foveolatus* adults from 5,618 mummies last month. The *Pediobius foveolatus* is a parasitoid wasp, originating from India, that attacks and kills Mexican Bean Beetle (MBB). Since the wasp is unable to overwinter in New Jersey, PABIL maintains the colony perpetually and makes targeted releases throughout the state each summer to keep MBB populations suppressed. Laboratory production of *Pediobius foveolatus* was at peak production levels in preparation for the late June demand. This parasitoid wasp attacks and kills *Epilachna varivestis*, also known as Mexican Bean Beetle, which causes severe leaf damage to bean plants.

On-Farm Dairy Processing – The Marketing and Development Division is reporting that on-farm processing continues to advance with multiple farms at various stages of planning and construction. Other farms have plans ready to submit to New Jersey Department of Health (NJ DOH), which is short-staffed due to retirements and hiring freezes. Work was also conducted with the NJ DOH on the plans and label approvals.

School Nutrition Program – The Food and Nutrition Division's School Nutrition Program has been offering new sponsor virtual sessions. These sessions have benefitted new sponsors with weekly information on critical areas about how to run their program, how to select and implement what is the most fitting option for their schools and lunch setup, while still meeting the guidelines.