

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

June 28, 2023

FFA State Convention – Nearly 700 FFA members, advisors and guests attended the State FFA Convention to recognize FFA members and chapters for their accomplishments throughout the year and conduct State Association business. Forty-Six FFA members received their State Degrees, 98 received new FFA jackets through a special project of the New Jersey FFA Foundation, and 88 judges and coordinators representing the NJDA, the USDA, the NJDOE, FFA Alumni, past state officers and agricultural industries evaluated members competing in career development events. The convention welcomed many distinguished speakers such as Secretary Fisher; Assistant Commissioner of Education, Jordan Schiff; NJDA Division Director for Ag & Natural Resources, Frank Minch; New Jersey Farm Bureau President, Allen Carter; New Jersey Agricultural Society Executive Director, Newell Thompson; People First Leadership Solutions President, Shea Booster; and National FFA Southern Region Vice President, MacKenna Clifton. The conclusion of the convention saw the election of the 2023-24 State FFA Officer team. Chase Sherburne of the Salem Tech FFA Chapter will lead the team as the new state president.

Jersey Fresh Marketing – Marketing and Development Division staff finalized creative materials and late season radio spots for the 2023 campaign “Grown Right. Here.” Billboards and radio spots with new commodities each week are running. Also, bus posters in English and Spanish have started on heavily traveled routes, and cable TV spots are running on systems throughout New Jersey. The division worked with OIT and a vendor to relaunch the FindJerseyFresh.com website through a new provider and continues to work on the farmer/vendor portal which will debut later this summer.

School Nutrition Program – The Food and Nutrition Division's School Nutrition Program unit is preparing for the start of the new school year which is initiated through the School Nutrition Electronic Application and Reimbursement System (SNEARS) annual packet activation scheduled for July 5, 2023. All school districts must go into the system to renew the agreement and policy as well as update their district's school sites that will be participating next year. Designated staff will be reviewing and approving their information in the system. Simultaneously, unit staff are working diligently updating the School Year 2023-24 Meal Application to encompass the new eligibility levels as required by the Working Class Families Legislation. Staff members are updating the civil rights statement throughout the site as well as within all forms.

Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program – Plant Industry Division staff conducted the first of three inspections of newly imported boxwood plants in late May. A total of 40 New Jersey nurseries are participating in the 2023 Boxwood Blight (BWB) “Cleanliness Program”. These nurseries were visited and visually inspected for symptoms of boxwood blight; *Calonectria pseudonaviculata*. Each nursery had been trained prior to this growing season and preapproved for quarantine compliance per the guidelines outlined by NJDA, then issued the necessary phytosanitary certificate. No incidents of BWB were detected during these inspections.

Live Bird Marketing System – During May, NJDA Division of Animal Health technicians conducted unannounced inspections at 26 registered NJ live bird markets and sampled poultry from 15 markets for avian influenza. Additional activities included the quarterly closure of 15 live bird markets; the inspection of three poultry distributors; reviewing records and vehicle cleaning and disinfection logbooks to ensure compliance; avian influenza testing of one in-state poultry distributor; and avian influenza testing of 49 backyard poultry flocks.

Farm To School – The Food and Nutrition Division’s Farm to School team attended the Mid-Atlantic Regional USDA Conference June 13-15. The NJDA attended with four members of the Farm to School team, including the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Coordinator. States in the region learned how the NJDA has incentivized purchasing locally through the federally funded Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. The Farm to School team also shared with the region their plans for the Farm to School Formula grant which include ongoing workshops to encourage implementation of agriculture and nutrition education, locally sourced scratch cooking, and collaboration between the classroom, cafeteria, and community.

Spotted Lanternfly Funding – With the appropriation of legislative funding to assist in the control of spotted lanternfly in the state, the Department has provided a funding opportunity to assist county and municipal governments in their efforts to slow the spread and reduce spotted lanternfly populations. The Department can assist New Jersey counties up to \$50,000 and municipalities up to \$15,000 by reimbursing efforts for costs they accrue for chemical treatment activities associated with spotted lanternfly control. To date, a total of \$1,130,000 in state and federal funding has been encumbered to reimburse 72 municipal and one county governmental agencies that have applied for this opportunity.

Wildfire Safety Resources – Due to the active wildfire season in New Jersey, the NJDA Division of Animal Health has updated livestock and pet wildfire preparedness and safety resources on its animal emergency website. Animal owners are reminded to organize a pet go kit and be prepared to evacuate with their pets if required. Livestock owners, in particular, are reminded to plan for transportation resources and alternative housing in case of an evacuation. The NJDA shared a post on social media on June 7, 2023, to educate animal owners of wildfire safety and direct them to the animal emergency website to learn more.

New Jersey Envirothon – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff marked the first year back to an in-person competition for the NJ Envirothon since the pandemic in 2020. The theme for the competition was “Adapting to a Changing Climate”. The NJ Association of Conservation Districts worked with the host Soil Conservation District, Freehold to bring the event back for students to participate as intended, hands-on, face-to-face interacting with conservation professionals. Sara Mellor from the Division provided opening remarks of encouragement to the 14 participating teams. Two division staff members were judges at the team presentation station, the topic was how to mitigate Newark’s Urban Heat Island Effect. Metuchen High School won the Team Presentation Station.

Commodity Inspection and Grading – Marketing and Development Division Commodity Inspection and Grading staff are conducting all requested USDA Terminal Market and Shipping Point inspections, which average about 600 per month; scheduling and conducting USDA on-farm Third Party Audits; collecting animal feed and fertilizer samples; updating Animal Feed and Produce Safety Inventories, verifying Qualified Exempt Farms for Produce Safety Rule; developing SOP’s for Produce Safety grant; verifying Produce Safety Farm inventory with in-person visits and conducting Produce Safety Inspections.