

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

October 25, 2023

School Nutrition – Throughout October, the Food and Nutrition Division's school nutrition representatives collaborated with the Farm to School team to participate and attend events throughout the state highlighting National Farm to School Month. Additionally, October features National School Lunch Week. The USDA provides activities for schools to incorporate in the curriculum throughout the week. The School Nutrition Programs Unit celebrated National School Lunch week by visiting Samsel Upper Elementary at the Sayreville Board of Education on Thursday, October 12, 2023. The children were happy to talk to the visitors and participated in the lunch program as well as utilizing their salad bar. We applaud Nicholas Cittadino, Food Service Director and Erin Hill, School Business Administrator for their great work.

Ag Education – The 2023 Fall Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR) Education Professional Development Conference "Creating Connections – Building Programs – Marketing Success" welcomed nearly 40 teachers and guests. The conference was held at the Rutgers EcoComplex and emceed by New Jersey Association of Agriculture Educators (NJAAE) President and Ag Teacher at Woodstown High School Deanna Miller. Participants engaged in a full day of workshops including topics about inquiry-based instruction; educator resources on FFA.org; and the Agricultural Experience Tracker. Attendees participated in a panel discussion on partnerships with school and community; heard updates from Erin Noble (NJDA Office of FANRE/FFA update), and engaged with National Association of Agricultural Educators representatives, Sherisa Nailor and Krista Pontius in a Teacher Resilience workshop.

Emergency Preparedness – The Division Animal Health's Emergency Preparedness Coordinator discussed partnership and support from the USDA during a meeting with the new USDA Regional Emergency Support Function #11 Coordinator for New York and New Jersey. During this preliminary conversation, the State's program, its strengths, and challenges were discussed. There will be ample opportunity to integrate the USDA ESF #11 coordinator into the New Jersey programs, including the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza working group and service animal working group. Additionally, there is interest in restoring the Animal Emergency Working Group (AEWG) mission and applied effort in which the USDA may be able to assist in coordination and retention of members.

Jersey Fresh – Marketing and Development Division staff is shipping and delivering point-of-purchase materials to retailers, writing articles, and continue to publish and disseminate Jersey Fresh social media updates. Staff continues to assist commodity councils in marketing support including marketing assistance for the NJ Apple Council (social media and photo contest) and New Jersey Sire Stakes (coordination of advertisement for industry publications). Staff attended the New Jersey Food Council meeting with supermarket retail representatives and legislators. Division staff also attended the International Fresh Produce Association trade show in Anaheim, Calif.

Nursery Inspection Program – Plant Industry Division nursery staff performed fall inspections at five of New Jersey's largest blueberry nursery stock producers located in Atlantic and Burlington counties during September. Horticultural staff inspected more than 589,499 blueberry plants at the seven nursery locations: 30,487 mother plants, 207,344 nursery plants, 339,322 cuttings and 12,346 containers. A total of 101 plants were rejected and destroyed due to disease; three plants displayed symptoms of the stunt virus while 98 exhibited the ring-spot virus.

Child and Adult Food Program – The Food and Nutrition Division's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Coordinator attended the Connecting NJ 2023 Vision Planning virtual meeting, on Wednesday, September 27, 2023. Connecting NJ is a network of partners and agencies dedicated to helping New

Jersey families thrive by providing fathers, grandparents, and guardians free or affordable access to people, organizations, and other sources of information needed to raise healthy children.

Pathology Laboratory Testing – The Division of Animal Health’s Pathology Laboratory Section for the month of September 2023 completed a total of 150 tests and/or procedures. Tests and/or procedures involved gross necropsy examination, histopathologic (microscopic), immunohistochemical, and parasitological preparation and evaluation. These cases generated additional diagnostic tests for other laboratory sections (e.g., bacteriology, virology, and molecular). Results from these case submissions help support practicing veterinarians (large, mixed, and small animals), private food and companion animal owners, NJ State Agencies, racetracks, wildlife, zoos, and nonprofit animal facilities. Cases involved diagnostic testing for disease and/or cause of death diagnosis and routine and/or sporadic disease surveillance for large and small ruminants, companion animals, and exotic/zoo species; sudden death with no clinical symptoms; assessment of backyard and small flock health issues; large scale flock disease; law enforcement forensic investigation, and animals exhibiting neurologic symptoms.

Dairy and Livestock Processing – Marketing and Development Division staff continue to work with dairy and livestock processors to further define programs and monies available for each specific project. Work continues expanding the innovation center to have poultry and dairy defined into the current Red Meat project. The initial producer working group that is focused on developing the statewide organization and a North Jersey processing center have formed a 501-C3, have a feasibility study and business plan approximately 70 percent completed and will have a final draft for submission for the second round of the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program (MPPEP) grant program due November 22, 2023.

Farm Conservation – NJDA staff visited a preserved farm in Hunterdon County to collect information about the practices performed at the farm that can be included in the landowners Farm Conservation Plan (FCP) which is a requirement as this farm is preserved through the State’s Farmland Preservation Program. NJDA staff will generate maps, complete associated documents, and submit the FCP for review and approval through Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Soil Conservation District.

LDD (*Lymantria dispar dispar* – formerly gypsy moth) Surveys – Plant Industry Division staff has had 34 municipalities request LDD ground egg mass surveys during the fall through winter to determine if treatments would be necessary next spring. To date, a total of 14 municipal surveys have been completed with 908 acres of residential forested lands in 15 blocks in six municipalities proposed for treatment in 2024.