

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

February 6, 2024

Farm to School Map – The Food and Nutrition Division's Farm to School Team has created a digital map as well as a physical map of the farms that have had their product in schools across New Jersey. The map will be on display at the State Agricultural Convention as well as having a QR code on display for the digital map. The map will be continually updated throughout the duration of the Local Food for Schools funding.

Jersey Fresh – Marketing and Development Division staff are shipping and delivering point-of-purchase materials, writing articles, and continuing to publish and disseminate Jersey Fresh social media updates. Staff continues to assist commodity councils in marketing support including marketing assistance for New Jersey Sire Stakes (coordination of ads for industry publications) and for the New Jersey Blueberry Council.

Teach Ag Recruitment Event – The New Jersey Office of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Education hosted its annual Teach Agriculture Recruitment Event at the Cook Student Center at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University in December. This event was made possible as the result of the State Teach Agriculture Results (STAR) Program. Seventeen high school and collegiate students attended this event. The day included a "Do What You Love, Love What You Do" presentation, a recruitment workshop, an agriculture teacher roundtable discussion, a professional organizations discussion, a panel discussion of college students, highlights of attending Rutgers University and Delaware Valley University for agricultural education, tips for a successful college experience and a tour of Cook campus. Fourteen guests and presenters aided in making the day a success. There is an anticipated need for several new agriculture teachers within the next few years due to retirement and attrition.

Animal Emergency Website Update – The Division of Animal Health's Animal Emergency Preparedness Coordinator collaborated with NJ OIT to finalize the animal emergency website redesign. The updated site is now posted and available to the public at <https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/animalemergency/>. Highlights of the website include renewed information on the County Animal Response Teams and the State Animal Response Team to explain the importance of these teams and provide recruitment options for more volunteers. The site provides animal owners, for both household pets and livestock, guidance on how to prepare, plan, and respond in the event of a disaster. There is plentiful information regarding how to care for animals in extreme temperatures. Notably, a new feature of the website is the "Happenings" page, in which details of upcoming and previous trainings are posted, such as the Animal Emergency Working Group Symposium that takes place each Spring.

New Jersey Hemp Program – Plant Industry Division staff attended a Hemp Fiber Symposium hosted by Rutgers University in January that included several New Jersey Hemp producers. The event marked the first hemp-focused symposium in the state. The focus of the Symposium was to address challenges faced by processors related to the decortication process, along with potential uses for fiber production and funding sources. The event proved beneficial in creating dialogue between growers and processors/manufacturers

Summer Food Service Program – The Food and Nutrition Division's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Team has sent the annual memo to Seamless Summer Option (SSO) programs that would like to transition to the SFSP that will be posted in School Nutrition Electronic Application and Reimbursement System (SNEARS). SSO's have the option to transition to the SFSP to receive the higher reimbursement rate utilizing the same meal pattern, and meal counting procedures implemented throughout the school year.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Permitting Goes Online – With the identification of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Pennsylvania in late December 2023, New Jersey’s 72-hour testing and permitting procedure for live bird markets took effect. During this time, the NJDA’s Division of Animal Health identified a need to simplify and improve the permitting experience for the public. Collaboration within the Department of Agriculture and contractors resulted in the NJDA launching an online HPAI permit request form. Permit requesters can complete an online form and receive their permit digitally to their email, a more streamlined permitting experience. Online permitting can be found at <https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/ah/>.

Dairy Opportunities – Dairy Business Innovation Center grant opportunities have been distributed to various operations that could apply if they so desire. One farm applied for the on-farm bulk milk storage and cooling grant. Other grant opportunities are being researched and information disseminated to known interested parties. The Clover Farms project continues to develop. The processor is reviewing start-up times and if milk can be received prior to the New Jersey milk tank being in place so that producers may not have to wait to enter a new market after the tank is in place. It appears many shippers have an anniversary date in early spring.

Soil Conservation District Review Assessments – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff received District Review Assessments from the 14 Soil Conservation Districts that had the districts review several operational topics. The topics included board management, personnel management, ethics, training, program planning, open public meetings, records management, insurance, website management, annual budget, annual audit, and financial procedures. The Division is compiling the data to identify what areas need to be addressed and worked on to meet standard expectations among the districts.

Nursery Inspection Program – The Plant Industry Division’s Nursery Program maintains quarantine-compliance agreements with nine individual growers. These agreements have been renewed for the 2024 season and nursery staff will review these agreements with the growers for signature. There were 1,047 nursery inspections, 650 dealer inspections and 413 federal and domestic phytosanitary inspections conducted throughout 2023.