**RESOLUTION # 2**

**FEDERAL FARM BILL PRIORITIES**

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey agriculture is diverse, spanning nearly a dozen major sectors, and depends upon the vitality of a variety of agricultural products and enterprises to make the overall industry a success; and

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey farms’ proximity to population centers brings with it unique challenges not faced in those states where significantly lower population densities make it less likely that farmers will confront noise, odor, and other complaints from neighboring residents; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey’s diversified economy and various industries make it more of a challenge for farm operators to find, train, and retain adequate labor; and

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey’s continuous dedication to protecting and improving the environment has created the need for farmers to be ever mindful of the need to be stewards of their land, water and other natural resources, both for the benefit of their own operations and for the quality of life of all residents; and

**WHEREAS**,for these reasons, New Jersey farmers face unique challenges in their efforts to keep their farm operations viable and thriving, creating the need to rely on certain government programs to help them meet these challenges; and

**WHEREAS**,the State of New Jersey can cover the costs of operating these essential government programs only with the assistance of federal funding; and

**WHEREAS**,the federal Farm Bill historically contains within it the spending priorities for the nation’s agricultural industry, including nutritional programs that are interconnected with agriculture; and

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey farms’ needs from federal programs are significantly different from those of farms in many other regions of the country; and

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey’s diverse agriculture, typified by farms ranging from as small as five or 10 acres to those over more than 3,000 acres, which produce a variety of crops, benefits from a strong emphasis on grants for promoting what USDA refers to as Specialty Crops, and those programs are designed to increase consumer awareness about fresh produce, improve access to foreign markets, ensure food safety, strengthen research efforts, enhance conservation programs, and encourage investment and efficiency; and

**WHEREAS**, “Specialty Crops” as a catchall phrase for most crops outside of the “Big Five” commodity crops is inadequate to describe the farm products most often purchased fresh by consumers at retail outlets (items like blueberries, lettuces, peaches, cucumbers, etc.), often leaving consumers and even members of Congress debating agriculture programs confused about what “Specialty Crops” means; and

**WHEREAS**, aquaculture is a sector of New Jersey agriculture that is growing in importance and its products are equally beneficial for good nutrition as are crops currently referred to as “Specialty Crops; and

**WHEREAS**,a broad array of agricultural trade associations representing United States growers and shippers are continuing to work on achieving mutual objectives for the Farm Bill and assuring a common platform across regions, commodities, and other interests, including allies in support of the production of “specialty crops”; and

**WHEREAS**, a recent trend in New Jersey agriculture has emerged in which larger fruit and vegetable growers who traditionally sell fresh products into wholesale markets increasingly find themselves at a competitive disadvantage with growers from other states where labor and other input costs are significantly less than in New Jersey, as well as with imported produce from foreign countries, where costs are even lower; and

**WHEREAS**, these larger, wholesale-oriented growers are crucial in contributing to New Jersey ranking in the “Top-10” producing states in a wide array of fruits and vegetables, including bell peppers, eggplant, blueberries, cranberries, spinach, among others; and

**WHEREAS,** maintaining those high rankings in production has a direct impact on federal funding coming to the state’s Specialty Crops growers because of their importance to New Jersey’s overall agriculture landscape; and

**WHEREAS**,as roughly 80 percent of Farm Bill funding is directed toward nutrition programs, both in school feeding and community-feeding efforts, New Jersey works closely with the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service to support a number of feeding programs that bring nutritious products to children, the elderly and those in need, while simultaneously creating deeper connections between farmers and those feeding programs by directing more locally grown agricultural products into them; and

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey is committed to bringing more of the fruits and vegetables produced by its farmers into those programs to ensure that the offerings are of the highest practicable nutritional value; and

**WHEREAS**,funding targeted for these feeding programs can be stretched by ensuring, whenever possible, that products be bought locally first, regionally second and

nationally and internationally as a last resort, thereby cutting the associated transportation costs, especially in times of rising fuel prices; and

**WHEREAS**,New Jersey also is home to numerous grain and forage producers who receive a much-needed benefit from the Farm Bill’s commodities funding; and

**WHEREAS**, grain and forage producers strongly support a minimum safety net for grain producers throughout New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey is also home to dairy and livestock producers whose stewardship maintains a considerable amount of agricultural lands; and

**WHEREAS**, the support for the crop sectors that sell feed to livestock producers helps to keep costs to those livestock producers from rising; and

**WHEREAS**, the approach of the federal government toward relying on subsidized crop insurance premiums as a farmer’s sole protection from the devastation of severe weather events – including hurricanes, other persistent flooding rains, hail, extreme heat, drought or any other extreme weather, as well as market loss due to quality and low prices – appears to be increasing rather than decreasing, since it is a way of addressing a farmer’s losses without the additional expense of direct ad-hoc payments; and

# **WHEREAS**, federal crop insurance programs, in which premiums paid by farmers are subsidized with federal funds, receive their authorizations and operating parameters through the Farm Bill; and

**WHEREAS,** the New Jersey Legislature in early-2022 approved, and the Governor signed into law, a measure that directs the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to subsidize premium payments for dairy farmer for the USDA margin protection program, and fully funded that new approach; and

**WHEREAS**, the state’s Specialty Crop growers also would benefit from a similar approach to help subsidize their crop-insurance premium payments; and

**WHEREAS**, apple growers in the various counties need a program that would encompass the entire state, not limited to counties, especially as some orchards in the northern part of the state cross county lines, with one county having a defined program and established yields and the neighboring counties not having a defined program, leaving producers at a disadvantage in the under-established counties; and

**WHEREAS**, the Farm Bill also provides federal funding for the Land Grant university system, including New Jersey’s Land Grant university, Rutgers, and this funding makes possible an array of research and development for agricultural products and production

innovation, thereby bolstering the State-level funding that goes to Rutgers and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES); and

**WHEREAS**, public colleges of agriculture, including the Land Grant university system, face unprecedented facilities challenges, attempting to conduct 21st century research in buildings that were constructed 60 to 70 years ago, and the Farm Bill can be one of the vehicles by which federal funding to address those challenges can be directed to the facility needs of those agriculture colleges; and

**WHEREAS**, the Farm Bill, along with some recently passed legislation regarding economic recovery and supply chain issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, will have

funding targeted toward enhancing smaller, independent processors of meat and other livestock products to ensure a more reliable supply chain for such products; and

**WHEREAS**, the Farm Bill also can include funding for projects to bring reliable broadband to the rural areas of New Jersey, which is desperately needed by farmers to enable them to keep pace with technological advances in both producing and marketing agricultural products; and

**WHEREAS**,Title II of the federal Farm Bill is one of the larger non-nutrition titles, accounting for more than 7 percent of the total projected Farm Bill appropriations and contains within it the natural resource conservation programs that are interconnected with agriculture; and

**WHEREAS** – Current farm bill changed milk pricing by eliminating the formula that sets the “higher of” class 1 price mover and has caused millions in losses to dairy farmers across this country and has had a devastating impact to dairy farmers in this state.

**WHEREAS,** Congress has approved a one-year extension of the existing Farm Bill, setting it to expire on September 30, 2024, with programs continuing to be funded at the existing levels for one more year, meaning there is time to coalesce agriculture-advocacy groups and federal legislators working on agriculture’s behalf into an effective force in shaping the next Farm Bill.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 109th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 7-8, 2024, urge the Congress of the United States to include within the next Farm Bill, and urge the New Jersey Congressional Delegation to advocate for and support the following:

* Initiate funding for invasive-plants research.
* additional funding and other support for Specialty Crops, as well as a shift in Specialty Crop support to create more direct payments to those growers, akin to the support payments that go to the “Big Five” commodities and giving serious consideration to changing the term “Specialty Crops” to something that more accurately conveys the agricultural products currently covered under that definition;
* adding aquaculture products to the general heading of “Specialty Crops” (or any new name for those products designed to help the public further understand what is included under that heading);
* greater attention to conservation of farmland in states experiencing development pressures, especially those where development is centering on the building of massive warehousing operations on farmland, which erodes the farmland base and creates vastly more impervious cover than other types of development;
* funding to develop smaller, independent processors of meat and other livestock products to ensure a more reliable supply chain for such products, funding for increased USDA meat inspection in states that do not have state-level meat-inspection programs, funding for the expansion of large-animal veterinary services for the producers of animals destined for processing; reviewing the multiple definitions of “rural” in the USDA’s Rural Development programs to ensure that they focus on the importance of agriculture to a given geographical area, not simply the number of people living in those areas;
* examining the role that federal subsidies for crop insurance premiums can play in encouraging more farmers to secure such coverage to help them overcome weather, disease, pest, and other damage, thus reducing the reliance on ad-hoc disaster payments funded by the federal government; and
* reauthorizing and providing robust funding in the Farm Bill for the Research Facilities Act to address the facilities needs of colleges of agriculture, including the Land Grant university system, as advocated by the Association of Public Land Grant Universities.
* the continuation of adequate funding of natural resource conservation programs such as EQIP, CRP, ACEP, EWPP, and RCPP with a focus on Conservation Technical Assistance, and an examination of all programs to improve efficiencies and minimize time delays.
* BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we support the return to “higher of” class 1 milk pricing in the upcoming Farm Bill.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that, given the additional time until September 30, 2024, for a new Farm Bill to be enacted, we strongly urge all agricultural advocacy groups in New Jersey, including the delegates to this Convention, to convey to their Congressional representatives (both House and Senate) in the New Jersey Congressional Delegation to support and champion the ideas outlined in this resolution that would make the Farm Bill more appropriate to the types of farming found in New Jersey.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we request that state agriculture agencies and their partners identify and implement strategies to access Farm Bill funds and resources, through, for example, expanding technical service providers, conservation assistance personnel, and similar supports to farmers.