

NEWS FROM THE NJDA

New Jersey
Department of
Agriculture

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Important Dates for your Calendar:

November is National Peanut Butter Lovers Month

Nov. 10 - Forget-Me-Not Day

Nov. 11 - Veterans Day

Nov. 19 - State Board of Agriculture Meeting, Trenton, NJ

Nov. 23 - Eat a Cranberry Day

Nov. 27 - Thanksgiving Day

Nov. 29 - Square Dance Day

Dec. 1 - Eat a Red Apple Day

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From the Secretary's Desk



NJ Secretary of Agriculture, Douglas H. Fisher

On October 24 and 25, New Jersey was honored by a visit from Edward Avalos, USDA's Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. He had requested the visit after hearing about the wonderful successes we have had in promoting our agricultural programs. I met with Under Secretary Avalos on his two-day excursion through the Garden State as he was escorted on his tour by Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Al Murray.

His first stop was to State Board President Rich Norz' Norz Hill Farm in Hillsborough where he met with Norz to discuss New Jersey's Specialty Crop Block Grant award process.

He then stopped at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital - Somerset, the first hospital in the state to support Jersey Fresh. The hospital hosts a weekly seasonal farmers market and features locally-grown produce in the employee cafeteria and patients' menus.

Avalos also paid a visit to King's Supermarket in Whitehouse Station. The chain was one of the first to embrace the Jersey Fresh program when it debuted 31 years ago.

I joined Avalos at Hionis Greenhouses in Readington Township, a family owned and operated nursery and garden center that has more than six acres of greenhouse production. Hionis is a major supporter of Jersey Grown annuals. On the second day, I accompanied Avalos to the Collingswood Farmers Market and then he travelled on to Lee Brothers Cranberry Farm in Chatsworth and Tomasello Winery in Hamonton.

The Under Secretary appreciated the great overview of New Jersey's enterprising agricultural industry and we had great conversations about the future and how the USDA could be of further assistance. We thank Under Secretary Avalos for his interest in our state. It was a great visit.

From the State Board President



State Board of Agriculture President, Rich Norz

At the State Board meeting on October 22 the Board approved the Resolutions Committee for the upcoming State Agricultural Convention. As you know, one of the important purposes of the Convention is to introduce resolutions that help shape agricultural policy in New Jersey. These resolutions are important in helping the administration and Legislature better understand the opinions of agriculture.

As such, we are asking the industry for input in the resolutions process. If your county is working on issues you believe to have statewide implications for New Jersey's agricultural industry, we invite you to submit to the State Board of Agriculture resolutions to be heard and debated at the convention. With that in mind, the first meeting of the Resolutions Committee will be November 14 at the Trenton office.

NJDA staff continues planning for the 100th annual State Agricultural Convention to be held February 4 & 5, 2015 in Atlantic City. The convention will be held in conjunction with the 2015 New Jersey Agricultural Convention and Trade Show. While the actual location of the Convention is still being determined, due to the plight of the Trump Taj Mahal, you can be assured that the NJDA staff is working with the Vegetable Growers Association to have this resolved as soon as possible. The topics for the listening sessions are still being reviewed and we hope to have some interesting discussions! Please plan to join us at the convention. You can contact convention coordinator, Nancy Wood, for more information at nancy.wood@ag.state.nj.us.

The next State Board of Agriculture meeting will take place on November 19, 2014 at the Health & Agriculture Building, Trenton, beginning at 1:30 pm. In addition, the December meeting of the Board will take place on December 17, at the new office of the Department's Division of Food & Nutrition beginning at 1:30 pm.

SADC Winery Pilot Program Aims to Listen and Learn

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), which is required by a recently enacted law to establish a pilot program allowing wineries to conduct special occasion events on preserved farmland, will focus its efforts on collecting the information it needs in order to make informed recommendations to the Legislature at the pilot program's conclusion.

The SADC adopted a plan for its pilot program at its October 3rd meeting. It includes annually surveying winery operators, municipalities and other affected parties regarding special occasion events on these farms and the impacts of the law. The SADC noted that the pilot program is not voluntary, and that any winery that conducts special occasion events on preserved farmland outside of an exception area is automatically part of the program and subject to the law's requirements. The SADC considers July 2, 2014 – the date P.L. 2014, ch. 16 was signed into law – to be the start date of the pilot program. The pilot program expires in 44 months (March 2018).

The SADC does not anticipate the need to develop rules to implement the majority of the pilot program as the law's provisions are fairly specific. However, the SADC will need to develop rules to establish uniform audit procedures that it will use if an audit is necessary to verify a winery's compliance with the law's gross income requirement (i.e., special occasion events must account for less than 50 percent of the winery's gross income for the prior calendar year). The SADC intends to contract with a certified public accountant who has experience with wineries to assist in drafting the rules that establish audit protocols. CADBs, which also have the authority to request audits, also may choose to use those audit protocols if they wish.

A major responsibility of CADBs is to determine what constitutes a "special occasion event" in their county. The law defines a special occasion event as a "wedding, lifetime milestone event, or other cultural or social event as defined by the appropriate county agriculture development board."

The SADC will schedule meetings with CADBs to offer any assistance they need in implementing the law. It also will conduct outreach to wineries and municipalities to make sure they understand their responsibilities under the law.

A description of the SADC pilot program and a copy of the law can be found at www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/news/hottopics/. For more information, contact the SADC at (609) 984-2504 or sadc@ag.state.nj.us.



Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

NJDA Re-Forms Produce Safety Task Force for FSMA Prep

In 2006, as federal food-safety officials issued broad warnings against eating fresh, bagged spinach due to an E. coli outbreak, New Jersey's spinach farmers asked the Department for help in reassuring consumers that New Jersey-grown spinach was safe and not part of the problem.

Ultimately, the spinach E. coli scare was narrowed down to one farm in California as the origin of the tainted product. Although some New Jersey spinach farmers were impacted, a massive public-outreach and advertising campaign led by the NJDA helped to limit what could have been much wider damage to the spinach market here.

Thus was born the Produce Safety Task Force, a collaboration of the NJDA, New Jersey Department of Health, Rutgers University and all segments of the state's produce industry, to ensure that accurate information about foodborne illness was reaching the Garden State's residents. Other efforts would follow, including getting New Jersey on the "safe tomato list" in 2008, when federal officials incorrectly targeted tomatoes as the source of a salmonella outbreak (later found to stem from peppers imported from Mexico).

At the time, it was roundly assumed by Task Force members that new federal laws would be forthcoming aimed at preventing foodborne illnesses. And indeed, within a few years, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) had been passed by Congress and signed by the President.

As the Food and Drug Administration now finalizes the rules and regulations that will be needed to implement FSMA, the Produce Safety Task Force has been reconstituted, with the same representation from government, academia and the industry, with the aim of ensuring that New Jersey's farmers and food processors will be able to successfully negotiate this new minefield.

"The Produce Safety rule part of FSMA will, for the first time, bring inspectors onto farms the way they have been in food processing plants in the past," Secretary Fisher said. "Our farmers will need to be prepared to deal with that new reality."

At the first meeting of the re-formed task force on October 7, NJDA heard reports that many farmers have said they'll just declare themselves exempt under what's known as the "Tester Amendment" provision in FSMA. That provision gives smaller farms selling a majority of their products direct to the public an "out" to be exempt from FSMA requirements. However, that could come at a price.

"Some retailers have made it clear that anyone who 'Testers' themselves out of FSMA could have a hard time when selling to retail stores," said NJDA Policy Advisor Jeff Beach, who coordinates the task force for the Department. "Retailers say they are going to be reluctant to buy from someone who isn't complying with FSMA."

FSMA also will reclassify some farms as "food processors" if they make a value-added product from their agricultural harvest on the farm. This "mixed-used facility" designation will bring with it a higher level of scrutiny to the food-safety precautions taken as part of the making of those value-added products.

"Our goal is to help New Jersey's produce industry, and in fact all our farmers and food businesses, be as ready as they can be to deal with all the nuances of these new federal laws that will affect farming and food processing throughout our nation," Secretary Fisher said. "New Jersey has long been known for the quality of its farm products, so we need to continue that tradition under these new rules."

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Announces Key Dates

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is announcing key dates for farm owners and producers to keep in mind regarding the new 2014 Farm Bill established programs, Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC). The new programs, designed to help producers better manage risk, usher in one of the most significant reforms to U.S. farm programs in decades.

“The ARC and PLC programs are a significant reform in the farm safety net,” said Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Val Dolcini. “FSA wants to keep producers well informed on all steps in the process. We will continue our outreach efforts and maintain resources online to help them understand the new programs before they come in to make decisions for their operations.”

Dates associated with ARC and PLC that farm owners and producers need to know:

- Sept. 29, 2014 to Feb. 27, 2015: Land owners may visit their local Farm Service Agency office to update yield history and/or reallocate base acres.
- Nov. 17, 2014 to March 31, 2015: Producers make a one-time election of either ARC or PLC for the 2014 through 2018 crop years.
- Mid-April 2015 through summer 2015: Producers sign contracts for 2014 and 2015 crop years.
- October 2015: Payments for 2014 crop year, if needed.

USDA leaders will visit with producers across the country to share information and answer questions on the ARC and PLC programs. USDA helped create online tools to assist in the decision process, allowing farm owners and producers to enter information about their operation and see projections that show what ARC and/or PLC will mean for them under possible future scenarios. The new tools are now available at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity.

Today's announcement was made possible through the 2014 Farm Bill, which builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the past five years, while achieving meaningful reform and billions of dollars in savings for the taxpayer. Since enactment, USDA has made significant progress to implement each provision of this critical legislation, including providing disaster relief to farmers and ranchers; strengthening risk management tools; expanding access to rural credit; funding critical research; establishing innovative public-private conservation partnerships; developing new markets for rural-made products; and investing in infrastructure, housing and community facilities to help improve quality of life in rural America. For more information, visit www.usda.gov/farmbill.



Soybean harvest photo courtesy of Rodger Jany, Mercer County farmer