



State of New Jersey

## **BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**July 24, 2024**

**(Wednesday)**

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on July 18, 2024.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by giving written notice of the time, date, location and to the extent known the agenda of this meeting. At least 48-hours in advance this notice has been posted on the third floor, Riverview Plaza, Trenton, New Jersey; mailed to the Newark Star Ledger; the Camden Courier Post; the Philadelphia Inquirer and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Holly Sytsema called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 1:05 pm. Board members in attendance included President Holly Sytsema; Vice President Barney Hollinger (via Teams), Kurt Alstede, Lisa Specca, Bob Blew, David DeFrange, John Hart and Stephen V. Lee, IV (via Teams). The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary Ed Wengryn; Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health (via Teams); Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Melissa Pajak, Assistant Director, Amy Jankowski, Division of Food & Nutrition; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC; Christopher LaRegina, Nathan Schatz. Robert Vivian, Jeff Wolfe and Jeff Beach, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Ashley Kerr, NJ Farm Bureau; Bruce Eklund, State Statistician, National Statistics Service; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; State Executive Director Bob Andrzejczak, Sarah Lally, Farm Service Agency; Julie Hawkins, NRCS; Joel Viereck, State Board member-elect; Laura Tessieri, Organic and Regenerative Farming Board of NJ, and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

### **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

ON the MOTION of Bob Blew, seconded by Lisa Specca, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2024 regular meeting.

### **SWEARING IN OF NEW BOARD MEMBER**

At this time new member Joel Viereck was officially sworn-in by Senator John Burzichelli and then took his seat at the Board table.

## **REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Board President Holly Sytsema reported that the Nominations Committee had met, and the following motion was made:

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by John Hart, Bob Blew was nominated as the President of the State Board.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by John Hart, the Board voted unanimously to close the nominations for President.

The vote was unanimous in favor for Bob Blew as President of the State Board of Agriculture.

President Blew took over the meeting.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by John Hart, Lisa Specca was nominated as Vice President of the State Board.

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to close the nominations for Vice President.

The vote was unanimous in favor of Lisa Specca as Vice President of the State Board of Agriculture.

## **REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY**

Sarah Lally reported the following:

ERP deadlines for the Ash Tree removal program that many producers have long been waiting for.

### **Emergency Relief Program (ERP) 2022**

On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the *Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328)* that provides about \$3.7 billion in financial assistance for agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms and other eligible disasters occurring in calendar year 2022. Additionally, the Act specifically targeted up to about \$500 million to livestock producers for losses incurred due to drought or wildfire in calendar year 2022. ELRP for 2022 losses has been closed out and ERP 2022 implementation details will be provided soon. ERP 2022 Track 1 & 2 application approval and payment processing has been on hold since June 10, 2024 and remains so. No timetable has been provided for resumption of these processes.

Despite the hold on these processes, ERP 2022 Track 1 & 2 applications are still being accepted, and a deadline for application submission is August 14, 2024. In addition, a deadline of October 15, 2024 has been announced for the submission of eligibility documents– such as CCC-941 AGI and AD-1026 HELC/WC compliance forms among others. Eligibility documents not submitted by that date may result in partial or complete ineligibility for payment.

### Online Disaster Assistance Decision Tool for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish (including mollusk) producers

FSA, in partnership with FarmRaise, launched a new, online Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) Decision Tool. The tool is designed to assist agricultural producers who have been impacted by natural disasters access available program support. The Decision Tool is a resource only and is not an application for benefits or a determination of eligibility. <https://www.farmraise.com/usda-fsa>

### Loss Adjusters

New Jersey Farm Service Agency is seeking Loss Adjusters (LAs) for the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). Loss Adjusters are required to have knowledge of field crops and specialty crops, as well as a thorough understanding and execution of crop adjusting guidelines and program provisions, as applicable to FSA programs. If interested, please contact Aly Dyson, NJ FSA Farm Program Disaster Specialist, [Aly.Dyson@usda.gov](mailto:Aly.Dyson@usda.gov), with any questions.

### COC Elections & Nominations

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) is now accepting nominations for county committee members and encourages all farmers, ranchers, and FSA program participants to take part in the County Committee election nomination process.

Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for members. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction. Visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/New-Jersey/index](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/New-Jersey/index) to find out which LAA(s) are up for election in your County Office. Customers can identify which LAA they or their farming or ranching operation is in by using our GIS locator tool available at [fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://fsa.usda.gov/elections).

County committee members make important decisions about how Federal farm programs are administered locally. All nomination forms for the 2024 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by August 1, 2024. Agricultural producers who participate or cooperate in a USDA program and reside in the LAA that is up for election this year, may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits.

### Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP)

FSA County Offices began accepting OCCSP applications for the 2024 program year on May 13, 2024. Sign-up ends October 31, 2024. The 2024 program year covers eligible expenses paid by certified organic operations between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024. OCCSP provides cost share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products for the costs of obtaining or maintaining organic certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). Organic certification is obtained through certifying agents accredited by the NOP. For 2024, OCCSP will reimburse 75 percent of a certified operation's allowable certification costs, up to a maximum of \$750 for each of the following categories or "scopes": • crops • wild crops • livestock • processing/handling • State organic program fees.

### Continuous CRP

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will begin accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP) signup on January 12, 2024. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and landowners interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners. Additionally, producers participating in CRP can apply to re-enroll beginning January 12, 2024 if their contracts will expire this year.

To submit an offer, producers should contact the FSA at their local USDA Service Center by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by October 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

Additionally, producers with acres enrolled in Continuous CRP set to expire September 30, 2024, can offer acres for re-enrollment beginning January 12, 2024. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring September 30, 2024.

### **REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Brian Schilling reported the following:

- 4-H Fairs in full swing across the State.
- Several new 4-H agents starting soon in Atlantic & Passaic Counties and an offer is out to Essex County for a new Ag & Natural Resources agent.
- Warren County Livestock position still under administrative review. The need in Salem County is a tough one.

### **REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU**

Ashley Kerr represented the Farm Bureau and reported on the following topics:

- Heat Stress – sent out mailer to 500+ members. Need for Farm Bureau, State Board and Rutgers RCE to meet and prepare for NJDOL discussions.
- Soil Protection Standard–2 comment period July 15–September 15, 2024.
- Need for North Jersey State Board Nominee Rick Gardner to get confirmed.
- SADC Appropriations – last minute amendments in the Assembly?
- State funded purchases of local produce by Food Banks, Farm Bureau has been involved as well as the Food Security Advocate's Office.
- Legislature on a summer break, getting ready for the Fall agenda.

### **REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)**

Bruce Eklund reported the following to the Board:

- Released the 2020 Census of Agriculture released earlier today. The information includes the ranking of markets value of ag products sold.
- Farm chemical use / cash rents / land values surveys are up next.

## **NATURAL RESEOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)**

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, returned to New Jersey following an extended work assignment in Washington, DC. She reported that she is getting reacclimated to New Jersey and that the final two months of the fiscal year have been very busy. She noted that sign up for FY '25 coverage will be open for ninety days.

## **ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD OF NJ**

Laura Tessieri, Secretary to the Board, reported that the Board held their second public meeting where they reviewed the by-laws that had been drafted. The Board will meet quarterly going forward in different regions of the state and will report monthly to the State Board. She thanked the Division of Marketing & Development staff for helping them to get organized.

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Secretary Wengryn reported that he had been on a tour of the County Ag Fairs, attending as many as was possible. In addition, he has been working the Board's Personnel Committee on the Chief of Staff position.

Melissa Pajak, Assistant Director and Amy Jankowski, Coordinator, Summer EBT were on hand from the Division of Food & Nutrition, as Director Rose Chamberlain was attending the State Director's Conference in Monterey, CA. Ms. Pajak reported that July 1, 2024 is the start of the new school year for school food service providers. Trainings are underway and technical assistance is available for those that need it. Ms. Jankowski reported to the Board that the Summer EBT Unit attended with the Director, the Summer Food Service Kick-Off event celebrating the Pemberton Township School District's commitment to feeding food insecure children over the summer months on July 18, 2024. The school district was recognized for participating in all three federal Summer Nutrition Programs for Kids: the Summer Food Service Program, the Summer Non-Congregate Meal Service Program and the Summer EBT Program. She reported that the USDA granted New Jersey's request for additional FY24 Summer EBT benefit funding in the amount of \$9.6 million to cover an additional 80,000 children. With the increase, a total of 630,00 children to be served in the program

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported to the Board that there is still wildlife fencing available. He noted that the Heat Stress bill was discussed during the Legislative Committee meeting the previous week and that further discussions will continue. It was reported that farm managers should keep a close watch on employees who may be adversely impacted by the heat and to follow the advice provided by the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) and the New Jersey Department of Health. He reported that the information is posted on the Department website for all growers. He reported that the staff continues to coordinate with others in the NJDA to obtain additional information on laboratory requirements for the testing of substances (blood, soil, tissue, etc.) for PFAS levels. It is an ongoing data collection initiative that is aimed at determining potential costs of monitoring and testing. He noted that testing will be very costly. PFAS issue continues to be a very important topic and that they will be establishing an inter-divisional Task Force with DEP / EPA, they will be focusing on drinking water. He reported that the Composting Field Day had been rescheduled for

August 14, 2024. Finally, he reported that they finally have been able to hire someone that deals with soil erosion.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, (via Teams) reported that there will be an upcoming HPAI webinar. He also noted that Oklahoma has been added to the list of HPAI affected dairy cattle states list. In addition, the DAH continues to monitor the Avian Influenza outbreak and provide resources to New Jersey poultry and cattle farmers. In collaboration with the NJDOH, guidance on obtaining PPE through extension offices was distributed to dairy farmers. Also, a memo to NJ veterinarians and cattle industry stakeholders was distributed to outline AI testing capabilities at the Animal Health Diagnostic laboratory. The HPAI working group continues to meet and provides an opportunity for partner agencies to share updates in preparedness and response plans for the disease in New Jersey livestock, poultry and humans. Finally, he reported that Division staff conducted unannounced inspections at 35 registered New Jersey live bird markets and sampled poultry from 14 markets for avian influenza.

Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC, reported that staff have been making their CADB outreach presentations on the Statewide Formula Value (SFV) having met with many of them to date but that there are a few more to go. He noted that the goal of the meetings is to briefly review the law and gather feedback on provided questions. He reported that a Technical Advisory Committee has been established to provide insight into identifying the most significant agricultural and natural resource factors which could be incorporated into the SFV. He reported that the SADC approved the publication of proposed changes to the original soil protections standards rule proposal at its April meeting. The changes are reflected in a red-line version of the rule proposal that is available on the SADC website. A notice of substantial changes upon adoption was published in the NJ Register on July 15, 2024 and will be subject to an additional 60-day formal public comment period. He reported that the SADC approved its third special occasion events (SOE) application on a farm with a diversified hay, livestock, and vegetable operation and aquaculture koi operation located in Hunterdon County. Lastly, he reported that revisions to Ag Mediation and Ag Management practice rules were published in the New Jersey Register on July 1, 2024. The revised rules are available on the SADC website.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry reported that a total of six counties and 96 municipalities signed up to participate in the 2024-2026 SLF population mitigation funding program. A total of \$2,220,000 has been encumbered for use by these agencies. In addition, Canadian Blueberry Fruit Certification Program has twenty-six growers enrolled in the 2024 program, of which 16 shipped a total 762,490 containers to Canada in June. Overall, the numbers of fresh blueberry fruit shipments to Canada decreased slightly from last year. Many growers reported issues with poor-pollination due to the weather this spring, some as low as 50 to 70%. He reported that the 2024 LDD Aerial Defoliation Survey began on June 14<sup>th</sup> in the southern counties of the state and was completed by June 19<sup>th</sup> in the north. A total of 140,528 acres sustained heavy to severe defoliation in 30 municipalities in nine counties throughout the state. Overall, the northernmost counties of Sussex, Passaic, and Bergen sustained the majority of the defoliation. Finally, he reported that Treasury will be meeting with the builder soon to come up with a schedule of when the renovations at the Bug lab will start.

Joe Atchison, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, thanked Barney Hollinger and Holly Sytsema for their leadership over the past year. He reported that the Division staff coordinated and attended the Jersey

Fresh National Blueberry Day promotion day on the boardwalks in Atlantic City, Seaside Heights and Wildwood. The grape tomato promotion day is scheduled for August 5 and peach promotion day scheduled on August 22 at the same locations. Staff continues to work with OIT and a vendor to finalize the FindJerseyFresh.com website. The Jersey Fresh 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Trivia Contest continues on Facebook and Instagram while staff is staying alert to remove scammers. Upcoming trade shows including New England Produce Council in Boston in August, International Fresh Produce Association in Atlanta in October and New York Produce Show in December.

### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Dave DeFrance reported that the weather hasn't been friendly; over 15 acres of forested land has been severely damaged; and the Hunterdon and Somerset CBAs are gearing up for their 4-H fairs.

Kurt Alstede reported the weather has caused high temperatures; and the Passaic and Morris CBAs met with Senator Anthony Bucco and the meeting went very well.

John Hart reported that the Mercer and Middlesex CBAs are not meeting during the summer; Mercer County Ag Fair is this weekend, and it's been very dry with just isolated showers.

Joel Viereck thanked the Board members for their warm welcome; Gloucester CBA is off for the summer; Gloucester and Cumberland CBAs are planning a joint legislative tour in August; and VGA is working on their convention and trade show.

Lisa Specca reported that the Monmouth and Ocean CBAs are on summer recess; the Burlington Co Ag Fair was held last week; and because of the high heat temperatures there is low pollination of the fall crops.

Holly Sytsema reported that there had been a lot of damage due to the recent storms; Bergen and Sussex CBAs met; and the Sussex Co Ag Fair will be held August 2-10.

President Blew reported that he had attended the Cumberland County fair and that they had a great attendance; the Salem Fair was a huge success; and he thanked Barney Hollinger and Holly Sytsema for their leadership over the past year and looks forward to the coming year.

### **BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Holly Sytsema reported that the Personnel Committee had met with the candidates for the Chief of Staff position and the following motion was made:

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Lisa Specca, the Board voted unanimously to select Tameko Webster as the new Chief of Staff for the Department of Agriculture.

David DeFrance reported that the Legislative Committee had met briefly and that Department staff would continue to work on legislative tours for the months of August and September.

## NEW BUSINESS

### Approval – 2024–2025 State Board Calendar

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted unanimously to approve the 2024–2025 calendar as presented.

### Approval – Wine Council Grants

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that the members of the wine council had met to review the applications for the New Jersey Wine Grants and made the following recommendations:

Garden State Wine Growers requested funding for marketing and public relations campaigns through all aspects of the media as well as continued support for the Wine Trail Weekends and Wine Week. Awarded: \$380,451.12

The Winemakers Co–Op requested funding for continued publishing New Jersey Grape & Wine Insider. Viticulture and vinification educational forum. Cost sharing program for vineyard floor management tools. Pilot study of sustainable packaging at NJ wine tasting rooms. Awarded: \$63,588.00

Outer Coastal Plain Vineyard Association requested funding for subsidizing costs for purchase of specific vines for vineyards. Providing affordable spring frost protection with smudge pots. Building new markets in urban areas. Awarded: \$30,000.00

ON the MOTION of John Hart, seconded by Dave DeFrange, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Wine Council Grants as presented.

### Approval – Council Budgets & Nominations

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Commodity Councils' Budgets and Nominations as presented by the Division of Marketing and Development.

### Approval – HR 133 Mini Grants

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that the Grants Committee had met to review the Underserved, Beginning and Military Veteran Farmers Mini–Grant Program applications. He reported that this is a competitive grant award program funded through the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's 2021 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program "H.R. 133" award, an appropriation made possible by the Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 (H.R. 133). Two Request for Proposals (RFPs) were opened to the public – one on March 26, 2024, and the second on May 10, 2024 – to initiate the competitive grant process associated with an allotment of \$300,000 approved for distribution by the USDA through the H.R. 133 award. Eligible entities to apply for this grant program included businesses and producers, as well as nonprofit and community–based organizations who identify as Socially–Disadvantaged, Beginning, or Veteran Farmers, who seek to develop projects that will increase production, marketing, and research of specialty crops.



Board members Kurt Alstede and Joel Viereck recused themselves from the discussion.

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by David DeFrangé, the Board voted to approve the Mini Grants as presented.

Proposal to Readopt N.J.A.C. 2:10 (Laboratory Services) with Amendments and a New Rule

NJSA 4:5-2.1 authorizes the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to adopt rules and regulations to charge reasonable fees to defray the cost of animal disease diagnostic testing services and necessary animal health tests. The proposed readoption on N.J.A.C. 2:10 with amendments and a new rule is necessary to enable the Department to continue to provide the New Jersey agricultural community and veterinarians with animal disease diagnostic testing services and to defray the costs incurred by the Department in providing those services. The collection of reasonable fees for animal disease diagnostic and testing services by the Department allows the Department to recover the costs incurred for materials, equipment, test kits, reagents and associated personnel expenses for these testing services.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by John Hart, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Proposal to Readopt N.J.A.C. 2:10 (Laboratory Services) with Amendments and a New Rule.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board adopts the following resolution:

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(8), the Board will evaluate an employee's performance in implementing strategic outreach to stakeholders, in filling job vacancies at the Department, and communications between the Department and the Board. The contents of this discussion will be made public next month in the minutes.

Under N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(7), the Board will also discuss a matter involving pending or anticipated litigation or contract negotiation other than in subsection b.(4) herein in which the public body is, or may become, a party, or matters falling within the attorney-client privilege. The Board will not disclose the contents of this part of the discussion because it falls under attorney-client privilege.

The Board will disclose the contents of the closed session as soon as we are able to do so. Minutes will be approved at a future Board meeting.

ON the MOTION of Lisa Specca, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted unanimously to enter into executive session.


### MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, August 28, 2024 beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

### ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 4:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn