



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING

November 20, 2024

(Wednesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on November 14, 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 Trenton Times and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Bob Blew called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 1:03 pm. Board members in attendance included President Bob Blew; Vice President Lisa Specca, Kurt Alstede, David DeFrango, John Hart, Stephen V. Lee, IV, Holly Sytsema and Joel Viereck. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary of Agriculture Edward Wengryn; Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison, Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC; Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff; Christopher LaRegina, Nathan Schatz, Andrea Rgizi, Alyssa Pitt, Kaitlynn Dixon, Robert Vivian, Jeff Wolfe and Jeff Beach, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Ashley Kerr, Alfred Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Bob Andrzejczak, State Executive Director, Sarah Lally, Farm Service Agency; Julie Hawkins, NRCS; Bruce Eklund, State Statistician; Jasmine Moreano, Organic & Regenerative Farming Board; Richard Gardner, State Board Member-Elect; Dr. Matthew Edson, Dean, Schreiber School of Veterinary Medicine (Teams) and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted to approve the minutes of the October 23, 2024, regular meeting.

Stephen Lee abstained from the vote.

President Blew publicly thanked outgoing Board President/member Holly Sytsema for her tireless dedication to the Board during her tenure and noted that she did it with grace and dignity.

SWEARING IN OF NEW BOARD MEMBER

At this time new member Richard Gardner was officially sworn-in by Senator Douglas Steinhardt and then took his seat at the Board table.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Dr. Brian Schilling represented the College and reported on the following topics:

- Also thanked former Board President Holly Sytsema for her work on the Board and for her dedication to the efforts of the College. She was at the helm during a very difficult time, while the Board was searching for a new Secretary of Agriculture and was always very gracious. He welcomed new member Rick Gardner to the Board and commented that he has known Rick for many years as he served on the Board of Managers.
- He commended the Farm Bureau on the completion of their recent convention, earlier that week and noted that there was a good exchange of information and excellent speakers.
- Noted some of the coming staff members that will be joining the Extension/College but also mentioned that long-time staffer Peggy Brennan will be retiring at the end of the year. He stated that she was one of the most capable and productive people that he has worked with during his career at the College.
- Hearing enthusiasm about the new SADC formula funding legislation and noted that there are a lot of eager landowners.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

Sarah Lally reported on behalf of the Farm Service Agency.

FSA County Committee Elections

Farm Service Agency County Committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and location administration of federal farm programs. Elections occur each year in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA). LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction. At this time, ballots have begun to be mailed out to any eligible voters recognized in the LAA up for this year's election. December 2nd is the final date for all ballots to be returned and/or postmarked to the County Office. Ballot counting will be completed prior to December 16th and those who were elected will start in the new year. Additional information regarding the LAAs up for election in each NJ FSA office can be found on the NJ FSA website: www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/New-Jersey/#Elections_2024.

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, with any questions.

Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC)

FSCSC provides financial assistance for specialty crop operations that incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification. This program helps offset costs to comply with regulatory requirements and market-driven food safety certification requirements. To be eligible for FSCSC, an applicant must:

- Have obtained or renewed a:
 - 2024 food safety certification that was issued between June 26, 2024 and December 31, 2024; or
 - 2025 food safety certification issued during the 2025 calendar year, and
- Have paid eligible expenses. Expenses that have been incurred by the applicant, but have not yet been paid, will not be eligible. Be a specialty crop operation; and meet the definition of a small business or a medium-sized business.
 - A small business has an average annual monetary value of specialty crops the applicant sold during the three-year period preceding the program year of no more than \$500,000.
 - A medium size business has an average annual monetary value of specialty crops the applicant sold during the three-year period preceding the program year of at least \$500,001 but no more than \$1,000,000.
- Be located in the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP)

2024 Organic certification applications with expenses paid by producers from October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024, can be late filed to FSA County Offices through February 7, 2025. Please contact your local county office ASAP to apply before funds run out. 2025 OCCSP information has not been announced.

ELAP – H5N1

FSA is now accepting applications through Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) to provide financial assistance to eligible dairy producers who incur milk losses due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, also known as H5N1 infection in their dairy herds. The program assists with a portion of financial losses resulting from reduced milk production when cattle are removed from commercial milking in dairy herds having a confirmed positive H5N1 test. Positive test results must be confirmed through the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL).

H5N1 infections have been detected in 14 states including California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. Dairy producers in all states are reminded to stay vigilant and follow established APHIS biosecurity,

detection and testing guidelines. In addition to testing, enhanced biosecurity is critical to containing this virus. USDA works closely with state animal health officials, producers, and industry organizations to provide guidance and resources for cleaning and disinfection not only on affected farms but for all livestock producers as a part of practicing good biosecurity.

Eligible adult dairy cattle must be:

- Part of a herd that has a confirmed positive H5N1 test from NVSL.
- Initially removed from commercial milk production at some point during the 14-day time period before the sample collection date for the positive H5N1 test date through 120 days after the sample collection date for the positive H5N1 test.
- Milk-producing, currently lactating; and
- Maintained for commercial milk production, in which the producer has a financial risk, on the beginning date of the eligible loss condition.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

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

- Continuing to follow the CATA lawsuit.
- Sent correspondence to the Governor's Office on the SADC appropriations noting the flaws in the legislation.
- Participated in the Department Budget listening session and noted that it was well attended.
- Watching the progress of the Farm Bill during lame duck and noted that Allen Carter and Peter Furey will be in Washington for the AFBF meetings and will be watching the Farm Bill closely.
- NJ Real was the most talked about at the Convention, there was a very good turn out and she thanked the Board members and NJDA staff that attended.

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

Bruce Eklund, State Statistician, reported the following:

- December 16 will be the release of the Aquaculture Census; the Irrigation Census was released on October 31.
- He reported that the December Ag Survey will include information on corn, soybeans and hay for the end of the year.
- End of year survey for vegetables will be released.

REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, reported the following:

- Provided the Board with their FY24 Statewide Departmental factsheet prior to the meeting today for their information. This information contained a breakdown of all final program numbers.

Dr. Matthew Edson, Dean of the Schreiber School of Veterinary Medicine, joined the call to discuss the letter that the Board sent regarding the need to have its in-state-trained veterinarians stay in the Garden State after graduation as there is a lack of vets for livestock animals including cows, chicken, swine and others. There was a brief discussion with Dr. Edson and both parties stated their strong desire to work together to make this a win for all of New Jersey.

ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD

Jasmine Moreano reported that the first meeting of the Organic & Regenerative Farming Board was held the week prior to today's meeting. There was a good turnout in-person and online. They approved the by-laws so now they can move forward, they are still waiting for two additional members to be named and confirmed. In addition, she reported that they are working on a survey to do an assessment of all growers in NJ to gauge the interest of those participating in Organic & Regenerative farming. It is hoped that the survey will be completed by January for dissemination. She reported that the next meeting of their Board would be January 25 as part of the NOFA Conference and invited all to attend.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary Wengryn announced that November is NJ Wine Month and that he has been working to bring more interest to NJ wine and noted that he would be doing some promotion of Secretary select to help promote NJ wines. He reported that he has meetings scheduled with DEP regarding the Stormwater rules and the final amendments for invasive species so they can get them back to the Legislature. He noted that regarding milk and dairy, there would soon be a federal mandatory tank testing program for Avian Influenza (HPAI) and how the State can help our dairy producers.

Chief of Staff Tameko Webster introduced the Department's new One Health Coordinator, Andrea Rgizi, to the Board and noted that she will be working with other One Health Coordinators in the State to help keep the State on top of all emerging topics focused on human and animal health.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported on the continued drought conditions and reported that the DEP held a virtual public hearing on Statewide Water Supply Warning on November 12. The statewide dry conditions were discussed as well as the rain-free forecast. He reported that moving from a drought watch to a warning means that the DEP Commissioner issues an order urging the public to voluntarily use water sparingly. In addition, the DEP may issue orders to purveyors to manage supplies in the most affected regions. He reported that mandatory water use restrictions would only come under a drought emergency issued by the Governor. The U.S. Drought monitor is used by federal agencies, such as USDA-Farm Service Agency to determine applicability of relief programs. For most programs, farms must be in an area designed as D2 for eight weeks, or any amount of time in D3. There was an extensive discussion regarding the drought conditions. It was noted by FSA that producers should document all losses related to the drought should a national disaster declaration is announced.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to give the Ag Policy Committee the permission to meet with representatives from FSA, Rutgers and NRCS to develop a fact sheet related to the drought that can be shared with the industry.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, thanked Holly Sytsema for her service on the State Board and welcomed new member Rick Gardner. He reported that due to the rise in cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the dairy and poultry industries that within the next month or so, the USDA will begin testing in all 50 states.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, reminded the Board about the upcoming USDA Foods Conference on December 5 in Edison and encouraged Board members to attend. She reported that staff from each unit in Food & Nutrition will be presenting information on each of their programs. In addition, she noted that there will be 40 processors of USDA foods that will also be there. She noted that they are expecting about 500 attendees.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, wished all a Happy Thanksgiving! He reported that program staff are assisting the NJDEP Forest Service with their Thousand Cankers Disease (TCD) study this year. The disease is detrimental to walnut species and could impact a component of our forest lands. In addition, he reported that over 92% of the requested LDD surveys have been completed and crews continue the remaining surveys in the northern counties. Anticipated completion of the remaining surveys by the end of the month. To date, a total of 19,463 acres of municipal and 953 acres of state lands have been proposed for single and double applications of Btk for the spring of 2025 in Burlington, Cape May, Morris, Passaic and Sussex Counties.

Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC, reported that a special meeting was held earlier in the week. In addition, staff from their Next Gen Unit attended the NJ Farm Bureau Convention and hoping to get some seasoned farmers to participate with them. He noted that four staff members were currently attending/presenting at the League of Municipalities Conference in Atlantic City. He announced that they are currently working to establish some dates for the selection committee for the new SADC Executive Director to meet to begin that process.

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison thanked Holly Sytsema for her time and dedication to the State Board and the Department during the time that there was not a Secretary of Agriculture. She was always ready and willing to get the things done that were necessary for the Department's day to day happenings. He thanked the Farm Bureau for the opportunity to speak at their Convention earlier this week and noted that the staff that manned the Department's display stated that there was a good turnout for the Convention. He reported that Department staff would be travelling to New York on December 11 for the New York Produce Show including Secretary Wengryn. He reported that Division staff has been looking at grant opportunities for dune Jersey native dune grass.

Secretary Wengryn also thanked Holly Sytsema for the time and dedication that she brought to the State Board during her tenure and especially her service as President of the Board. In addition, he reported that regarding the disaster declaration, he reported that information came in from the FSA office and that the Department had signed off that the drought situation should be declared a disaster.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

John Hart reported that Mercer County was still experiencing drought-like conditions. He reported that his farm brewery was just waiting for the State to give him his license. He noted that the deer problems continue to be a huge problem.

David DeFrance thanked Holly Sytsema for the time and dedication that she brought to the State Board on some very urgent matters facing the agricultural industry including SPS and the selection of a new Secretary of Agriculture to name just a few. He noted that her leadership during a very difficult time was exemplary. He welcomed Rick Gardner and stated that he looks forward to working with him going forward. He reported that Hunterdon County would be hosting their annual dinner this coming weekend and they will have a panel to discuss some very important topics, including ag viability; urban ag, conventional farming, etc. In addition, he reported that some of the topics of discussions at the county level include the NJDEP Real Rules, the SADC director position and the drought.

Kurt Alstede thanked Holly Sytsema for her time on the Board and welcomed new member Rick Gardner. He noted that everyone has already noted the drought-like conditions at almost every county board meeting. He reported that the dry weather has at least been good for direct marketers after last year's disastrous weather conditions with rain almost every weekend. He noted that consumers seem to be spending money this year and that also is helpful for direct marketers.

Stephen Lee reported thanked Holly for hanging on for the Board for a few extra months until Rick was able to get through the nomination process and for all the work she did as President. He reported that Burlington County held their annual dinner recently and it was very well received. He noted that there are talks to consider a joint Atlantic, Burlington and Camden County meeting which would be important for members of those contiguous counties to talk and share information. In addition, he attended the Farm Bureau Convention and was able to speak with many of the members there and felt that it was all well received. He noted that the dry conditions are extremely concerning for everyone in the agricultural industry. He reported that they had finished the cranberry crop with 515 barrels which was less than expected but considering the drought it was not a surprise. Finally, he attended the Resolutions Committee meeting along with President Blew, the prior week and there was a good turnout and good discussions on the Resolutions being prepared for the upcoming State Agricultural Convention.

Joel Viereck thanked Holly Sytsema for her service on the Board and looks forward to working with Rick. He noted that Gloucester County is extremely dry, and even their irrigations ponds are down quite a bit. He noted that there are still some producers that have product and are getting a good price for it. He reported that Gloucester County did reorganize, and that James Rambo would be President as of November 1 and Dr. Ernest Beier would be Vice President. He noted that there were several legislators at their annual dinner including Senator Burzichelli, Assemblywoman Heather Simmons and Assemblyman Spearman and a few of their County Commissioners. He noted that there have been several questions regarding DEP water allocations.

Rick Gardner thanked everyone for their well wishes and looks forward to working with the Board and noted that he has a lot to learn but is excited for the challenge. He has been farming since he was a kid, he is excited to represent Warren County on the Board. He noted that one of his goals is to try to figure

out a way to make farming affordable for the next generation. He stated that New Jersey is such a diverse state and a diverse geography, but we need to have food biosecurity. It's a tough thing in a state where the costs escalate much faster than other states.

Vice President Specca commended Holly Sytsema for her amazing service as President of the Board in the absence of a Secretary of Agriculture and an HR Manager. She worked with Assistant Secretary Atchison on a daily basis. She was a wonderful leader during a very difficult time. She reported that she looks forward to working with Rick on the State Board, however they were classmates in Class II of the NJALDP. She noted that she had attended the Burlington County Board of Ag dinner and publicly commended Danielle Wainwright who serves as the Chair of the Farm Bureau Women's Committee as well as the Chair of the Burlington County Board Women's Committee who organized the dinner and did so with an abundance of grace considering all that was going on. In addition, the Board awarded the Spirit of Agriculture Award to the Pearson family who despite a terrible farm accident, the family has come together and continues to farm. She attended the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture last night and reported that the Board is very concerned about the Heat Stress legislation. She reported that the bill had been reintroduced and there is a special exemption for agriculture where Rutgers, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labor & Workforce Development will be tasked with coming up with tailor made rules for agriculture and that is a win. The Department should have a collaborative role in enforcement, that shouldn't just go to Labor. The Secretary needs to be an integral part of that enforcement, and that language needs to be cleanly and clearly in the bill.

President Blew reported that he had attended the Farm Bureau Convention earlier in the week and sat in on their Resolution process and wants to have a copy of their resolutions so we can see the commonalities between the two groups and how we can all work together going forward. He noted that they are currently looking for candidates for Class 13 of the NJ Agricultural Leadership Development Program and noted that many on the Board as well as Secretary Wengryn have been members of the Leadership Program over the years.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

John Hart, Chair of the Wildlife/Livestock Committee reported that the Committee had met to discuss the concern about processing for deer with MOPAC not participating after December. He noted that there may be another rendering company that will help. He noted that there are too many deer and all the public lands near him to not allow hunting.

David DeFrance, Chair of the Ag Viability, reported that there was a brief meeting earlier that day with Board members on the Committee to review a few items and noted that there would be a meeting of the Ag Viability Committee on December 18, beginning at 10:00 am.

Kurt Alstede, Chair, Operations & Budget Committee reported that the Budget Listening Session for the Department was held earlier in the month and that it was well attended and some very robust and diverse commentary that we received. It emphasizes how vital the functions of the Department are to the people in the State. It was a great opportunity for public comment.

There was a brief discussion about some upcoming issues for the Legislative Committee and the following motion was made:

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to allow the Legislative Committee to invite outside participants if their input could be beneficial to the discussion.

Joel Viereck, Chair of the Nominations Committee, reported that the Committee had met previously to discuss the nominations received for the Distinguished Service Award. The Committee asked for the Board to allow their recommendation for awards to be followed without naming those selected so that the Board can send a letter of congratulations.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by David DeFrage, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Nominations Committee selection for Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award.

In addition, Chairman Viereck also reported that the Committee will be actively reviewing any openings on Commissions, Boards, etc. that need to be filled.

As Chair of the Convention Committee, he reported that the Committee had met earlier today and noted that a MOU between the Vegetable Growers and the Department of Agriculture was being reviewed by Legal Specialist Chris LaRegina and noted that Convention planning continues.

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to allow the Convention Committee to enter a MOU with the Vegetable Growers Association for the upcoming State Agricultural Convention.

NEW BUSINESS

President Blew then asked if the Board members had reviewed the draft letter they received regarding S-2788, which appropriates \$128.241 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues to the State Agriculture Development Committee for farmland preservation purposes. He reported that the Farm Bureau has come out and asked for a conditional veto of the bill and whether or not the Board wants to take a position. There was extensive discussion on the draft letter regarding the legislation. A second draft was prepared and discussed.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by David DeFrage, the Board voted unanimously to send a letter to the Governor urging him to conditionally veto S-2788 due to last minute amendments which would interfere with the way the SADC conducts its fiscal processes. The State Board can support the bill as originally introduced in the Senate as being in the interest of farmland and agricultural preservation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Stephen Lee, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 4:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn